

BETHENIA OWENS-ADAIR: OREGON PIONEER PHYSICIAN,
FEMINIST, AND REFORMER, 1840-1926

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Department of History
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

June 1984

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An Abstract of the Thesis of
Carol Kirkby McFarland for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of History to be taken June 1984
Title: BETHENIA OWENS-ADAIR: OREGON PIONEER PHYSICIAN, FEMINIST, AND
REFORMER, 1840-1926

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Bethenia Owens-Adair (1840-1926), Oregon pioneer and physician, exemplifies the classic struggle women face--career versus fundamental responsibilities as wife and mother.

Politicized by her experiences--unhappy marriage at fourteen and the stigma of divorce--she derived courage from her pioneer heritage, facing adversity with equanimity and dignity.

She acquired primary education through persistent study, supporting herself and son as schoolteacher, seamstress, and milliner. She worked tirelessly for equal rights for women, suffrage, and temperance.

The medical establishment's exclusionary policies failed to deter her from studying medicine. She won her first degree at an "irregular" college; the Doctor of Medicine at University of Michigan when she was forty.

Intellect triumphed over emotion in her public life; in private she agonized over conflicts of career, motherhood, and marriage. Her life illustrates the dilemma female professionals faced in the nineteenth century as they struggled for personal fulfillment and professional recognition.

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The overland journey to Oregon, growing up on the fringes of civilization, and confrontations with conservative frontier society influenced and shaped the character of Bethenia Owens-Adair (1840-1926). Since Bethenia Owens was only three years old when her family joined the Great Migration of 1843, and quite young during the pioneering days on the Clatsop Plains near Astoria and in Douglas County, the first two chapters of this biography contain considerable detail on her family's homesteading adventures, and the material and social culture which existed in the mid-nineteenth century in the west as a means of setting the scene for the main character.

Dr. Owens-Adair was a prolific writer who was motivated by disillusionment in her personal life and captured by the spirit of reform. In 1870 she began to write to Roseburg newspapers and later to Portland feminist newspapers where she took up the causes which would become her lifelong interests: equal rights for women, temperance, and woman suffrage. She persevered against the prejudices of society and the exclusionary policies of the medical profession to earn her medical degrees, and she told the story of her struggle and her resounding success in her autobiography Dr. Owens-Adair: Some of Her Life Experiences (Portland, Oregon: Mann & Beach Printers, 1906). In these pages she also revealed the agonizing conflicts she suffered as a woman who

tried to balance her intellectual and emotional life with the demands of marriage, motherhood, and her profession.

Conscious of her place in history, she saved letters, newspaper clippings, photographs, and numerous personal recollections in her journals which have recently been made available to me by her descendants. In addition to her own writings, several early historians of this region included Dr. Owens-Adair and members of her family in their pictorial and historical sketches of early pioneer families. Rediscovered in the 1980s she was one of the subjects in the drama The Northwest Woman by Dorothy Velasco, and has been included in a major book on women in the west* and a number of recent anthologies depicting prominent women of the west.

This work is the first extended scholarly analysis of Dr. Owens-Adair's life, an exploration facilitated by the use of primary source material including her journals, court records, census returns and public documents, newspapers, the books, papers and recollections of her acquaintances and descendants; and most significantly, the help of her relatives.

I am deeply grateful to the following individuals and organizations who have made this extended biography possible: Dr. Richard M. Brown, University of Oregon; Miss Marjorie Halderman, Astoria; John and Barbara Adair, Corvallis; Marjorie Adair Leback, Astoria; Bruce Berney, Director of the Astoria Public Library; Elizabeth Judd Niekes, Oakland, California; Helen Smith and Harriet Smith, Lake Oswego, Oregon; Judge Thomas E.

*Sandra L. Myres, Westering Women and the Frontier Experience, 1800-1915 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983).

Edison, Astoria; Susan K. Bettis, Portland; James Ewell, Eugene; Robert Rosaia, San Francisco, California; Ella Mae Young, Douglas County Museum, Roseburg; Richard Engeman, Jacksonville Historical Society; Frances Hare, Yakima Valley Historical Society; Catherine Farrell, Douglas County archivist, Roseburg; the staff at the Clatsop County courthouse, Astoria; librarians in the Special Collections, University of Oregon Library; and the Oregon Historical Society, Portland. And a special thanks to my parents and my daughter Amanda for their assistance and encouragement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I.	OVERLAND TO OREGON IN 1843.....	1
	Notes.....	11
II.	THE CLATSOP PLAINS: 1843-1853.....	15
	Notes.....	35
III.	THE LOVER'S KNOT UNRAVELS: 1854-1858.....	38
	Notes.....	55
IV.	STRANDED BUT NOT CONQUERED: 1859-1866.....	58
	Notes.....	74
V.	RESPECTABILITY, REFORM, AND THE HEALING ARTS: 1867-1873.....	77
	Notes.....	95
VI.	MRS. DOCTRESS IN THE GILDED AGE: 1874-1899.....	100
	Notes.....	133
VII.	THE LEGACY OF ADVERSITY: 1900-1926.....	141
	Notes.....	159
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	163

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. The Owens Family.....	41
2. Colonel John Adair, Bethenia Owens-Adair (standing), and Mattie Belle Palmer.....	115
3. The Adair Family Bible.....	127
4. Dr. Owens-Adair (ca. 1924).....	154

CHAPTER I

OVERLAND TO OREGON IN 1843

Beth Owens was only three years old when her parents joined more than nine hundred other adventurers at Independence, Missouri, for the more than 2,000-mile journey across the plains to the Oregon Country in the spring of 1843.¹ Encouraged by the promises of unlimited opportunity by early settlers like Dr. Marcus Whitman,² a missionary with nearly ten years' experience in the west, and other reports³ of rich and accessible land in a salubrious climate, the pioneers were lured by the tantalizing vision of bounteous living on the frontier.

For Beth Owens, a tiny mite of a child with snapping black eyes and thick, dark curly hair this journey would also have lifelong consequences.⁴ The friendships and experiences of the great migration, of homesteading new land in the west, together with vivid stories of her Owens and Damron ancestors would provide a powerful imagery to inspire and motivate Beth throughout her life.

Memories of the interminable dusty march, the hazardous and frequent river crossings, the hunger and discomfort, drownings and birthings, and encounters with curious Indians claimed the memory of Beth and her family over the years, but perhaps Beth's most vivid impression was of the friendship formed with Jesse Applegate, captain of the cow column.⁵

From time to time Applegate might swing Beth upward and allow the

child to perch on his shoulder as he trudged over rough trails scouting the best path for wagons and animals. The smooth progress of the lumbering train depended on Applegate's judgment of the often difficult terrain. It is probable that from models like this Beth tucked away images that would encourage her to chart paths into unknown territory and to rely on her own intelligence and determination to see her way through difficult times.⁶

The significance of the journey was not lost on pioneers who declared the trail west "the roughest road I ever saw" or those who correctly judged the Great Migration as the opening of a new era.⁷ The pride Beth felt in her pioneer heritage is explained in the way she later wrote of her ancestors and in her understanding of the personal traits which impelled them to behave courageously in the face of peril.

Thomas Owens, Beth's paternal grandfather, was born in Wyeth County, Virginia, in 1757. Owens took his family to Floyd County, Kentucky, in 1814, where he remained until his death at 94. He prospered in Floyd County as a businessman and plantation owner and was known as a man of exceptional financial ability. His Kentucky neighbors said Thomas Owens was a "valued citizen...a good husband, affectionate father and kind master."⁸

By his side, attending to the management of the slaves and plantation in her husband's absence was Grandmother Owens who also reared twelve healthy children, a major accomplishment in itself. Betheria's admiring portrait of her grandmother whom she probably never met, depicted her as "small in stature, but executive, she took full charge...in my grandfather's absence..." which Betheria dryly remarked

"...was most of the time."⁹ It was probably Grandmother Owens' son Thomas who was responsible for transferring his high regard of his mother's domestic competency and business acumen to Bethenia. Thus it is probable that at an early age Bethenia was impressed both by strong women within her family circle and by the fact that they had the respect and approval of their men.

While the Owenses suggested a connection to the landed gentry of the South, the Damrons, Bethenia's maternal grandparents, exemplified her pioneer heritage. Elements of heroism and bravery were the hallmarks of her English-born grandfather, Moses Damron, a Kentucky Indian fighter and frontiersman. As a government scout and spy in the early 1800s, he was involved in the daring rescue of a pioneer family from the Shawnee Indians, for which he was awarded "a splendid rifle, richly mounted in silver..." In another incident which took place in the Cumberland Mountains, Damron was credited with killing the "noted Indian terror, Big Foot."¹⁰

In 1812, Moses Damron married Jennie Mullins and by the time they moved to Illinois in 1826 there were six children including Bethenia's mother, Sarah, who was born in 1818. The family remained in Illinois for about two years but recurrent bouts with "the ague" convinced Moses he should return his family to the home place on the Big Sandy River in Kentucky. On the return journey both parents were stricken with "milk sickness."¹¹

Moses feared that in the custom of the day his children would be separated and bound out so he enlisted the support of his Masonic brethren to ensure the safe return of the children to relatives in Kentucky.

He drew a detailed map of the return route for his two eldest children, Moses and Sarah, aged 12 and 10. Within six days of the illness both parents had succumbed. The trip homeward took about a month. The children, who had their father's letter and map asking help from brother Masons, were treated kindly wherever they stopped.¹² When they arrived home the children went to live with relatives, and Sarah remained with her grandmother and an aunt until her marriage at age sixteen to Tom Owens, "a tall, rawboned, Kentuckian of exceptional ability," who had been a sheriff for about six years.¹³

Tom and Sarah Owens settled on a farm on the forks of the Big Sandy River, about seven miles from Piketon, Kentucky. Their first child, Thomas, survived only a few weeks, but another child, Diana, was born in 1838. After they had moved to Van Buren County, Missouri, their second daughter, Betheria Angelina was born on February 7, 1840.¹⁴ His family plagued by poor health, Tom sought relief in another move, this time to the "Platte Purchase" along the Missouri.¹⁵ In the spring of 1843 their second son, James W.F., whom they called Flem, was born. That spring, Tom Owens packed up his family and moved down to Independence to await the formation of a company of emigrants bound for Oregon. The Owens family was only one among a large number that had come down from the Platte Purchase under the leadership of Peter H. Burnett of Weston.¹⁶

The motivation for moving West seemed to vary with each family but economic reasons and health factors predominated. An economic downturn following the Panic of 1837 caused crop prices to fall in response to depression, and the resulting agricultural overproduction affected many farmers. In addition, receding floodwaters in the Missouri, Iowa, and

Illinois Valleys had brought sickness and disease to those areas and many sought a healthier climate. And for others, the lure of cheap land in the West represented an irresistible opportunity for a new start.¹⁷

The Missourian, Peter H. Burnett, was quite clear about his reasons for emigrating to Oregon. He said that he "went to Oregon for three purposes...to assist in building up a great American community on the Pacific Coast...to restore the health of Mrs. Burnett...and to become able to settle...debts."¹⁸ Jesse Applegate's response to the West reveals both a sense of adventure and an urgency to get there ahead of the crowd. In a hastily written letter home he says, "...this resolution has been conceived and matured in a very short time, but it is probably destiny, to which account I place it having neither time nor good reasons to offer in defence of so wild an undertaking." Nevertheless, he urged his brother Lisbon to join him in the Western adventure before "...every man and every man's neighbors and friends move in that direction."¹⁹

The men and women who contemplated the move West undoubtedly spent many hours discussing the merits of the step they were about to take. The compelling factors of economic opportunity and a more healthful climate probably were foremost considerations for the family. Already driven twice to seek out better circumstances because of ill health and the need to provide for a growing family, Tom and Sarah Owens made the decision for Oregon.

On May 20, 1843, the emigrants gathered for a meeting at Fitzhugh's Mill, twelve miles out of Independence, where they expected to complete the organization for the trip West. Owens and his family were among

those who had formed under the leadership of Peter H. Burnett of Weston.²⁰ Within a few weeks more than 900 persons, their wagons loaded with provisions, trailing a variety of livestock, were headed West. Since Oregon Territory was held in joint occupation by agreement between the United States and the British, those who reached Oregon were viewed by some as the manpower necessary for organization of a provisional government thus "putting the Hudson's Bay Company on the defensive and thereby 'saving' or 'winning' Oregon from Great Britain." The Great Migration would also serve to demonstrate that wagons could successfully be taken over the Continental Divide to The Dalles. The influx of settlers would open the way for an ever-increasing family emigration which would enhance the American occupation of the Pacific Coast.²¹

The story of the Owens family's journey across the plains survives in the 1897 recollections of Sarah who drew a realistic picture of hardy adventurers possessing a varying range of skills which at times seemed inadequate for the task at hand. The pioneers of 1843 survived a number of hazards during the course of the two-thousand mile journey but the stage was set early in the trip for what was to be their major problem--a shortage of food. Within days of their departure camped on the Big Blue River, the travelers were pelted with a torrential downpour and hit by high winds. The violent storm dampened most of the company's flour and cornmeal. Tom advised everyone to build fires and convert their precious stores of flour and meal into bread, but few, other than his wife, followed his instructions. When the train pulled out there were "thousands of pounds of meal" left by the roadside. Had Owens' advice been heeded no one would have suffered from lack of food.²²

After crossing the Big Blue, the train divided into two groups which traveled separately. Jesse Applegate was elected leader of the cow column, a group of about 60 wagons which he divided into 15 platoons of 4 wagons each. Most of these families had heavier wagons and 4 or 5 cattle apiece. Because of these encumbrances travel was slower and Applegate "had to use greater exertion and observe a more rigid discipline to keep pace with the more agile consort."²³ From that point, Applegate noted "all danger from Indians being over" the parties further separated into smaller groups which were better suited to the narrow mountain paths and small pastures along the trail.²⁴

Tom was made captain of the buffalo hunters when the train reached the Sweetwater River in present Wyoming. He had become known among his comrades as a man who could overcome every difficulty and it was said that you could "give Tom Owens a piece of wet moss and he...would...make a rousing camp fire."²⁵ When Tom and the hunters brought game into the camp, Sarah and the other women would set to work cutting it in thin slices and stringing the strips on ropes which they hung in the wagons until the meat was well-cured. With Tom occupied in leading the hunting parties, Sarah took the reins of the five yoke of oxen which pulled their large wagon, learning to negotiate the difficult river crossings while she kept a watchful eye on her three young children.²⁶

In spite of food shortages, the dirt, and the tedium involved in plodding slowly day after day toward the West, Sarah said it was a "jolly train" with music, singing and dancing nearly every night. In the early evening when the men tended the horses and cattle, the women gathered dried animal droppings, "buffalo chips," in their aprons, made

their fires and prepared supper which "was eaten and relished with appetites that only out-of-doors life can give."²⁷

At Independence Rock, the travelers were joined by Dr. Marcus Whitman who had traveled out to meet them from his mission at Wailatpu near present Walla Walla in Eastern Washington. Dr. Whitman and his wife Narcissa had established the Indian mission and school at Wailatpu in 1836 under the sponsorship of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, and the Whitmans were anxious to welcome new settlers to Oregon Territory.²⁸

Whitman remained with the train encouraging them onward. There were illnesses and accidents, stampeding buffalo herds to contend with, and always the shortage of food. However, river crossings seemed to hold the most hazards for the travelers. At one point the train was delayed three days while preparations were made to cross the deep, swiftly moving Platte River. The men tracked buffalo hides to the bottoms of several wagon beds and then loaded the "novel boats" with portable goods. Chains were fastened to the boats and swimmers and others on the stream's opposite bank guided the vessels safely across. Remaining wagons were disassembled and ferried across, and in this manner all of the members of the train and their goods eventually made the crossing. It required about two days for the party to get itself ready to move again. By the time Fort Hall came into view many were in desperate need to restock provisions and Tom was forced to sell his prized buffalo gun for \$50. When they reached the deep sagebrush country beyond South Pass, Applegate divided the train into platoons of

four wagons each so that each group could take its turn at breaking a road through the dense shrubs which ranged from two to six feet high.²⁹

As the overlanders pushed on toward the Blue Mountains, starvation caused some to consume the dead and disabled cattle left behind by Capt. J. W. Nesmith's advance party. Dr. Whitman left the train in the hands of an Indian guide who proved to be both faithful and competent while he went on ahead seeking provisions for the starving immigrants.³⁰ From time to time the starving emigrants acquired meager supplies of dried salmon and berries from Indians, or mountaineers like "Peg leg" Smith.³¹ Finally, to everyone's relief, Dr. Whitman returned just as the company crossed the summit of the Blue Mountains bringing desperately-needed supplies. "Then the parching of wheat and corn and the grinding of coffee mills made sweet music to our ears, bringing encouragement and happiness to all." In the midst of the rejoicing Sarah was called to assist a Mrs. Ollinger who "...ushered into the world a girl baby,--the first child born to the emigration of 1843." Next day, mother and child were placed in their wagon as the company descended the steep canyon rims into the Grande Ronde Valley. Here, trees were secured to the back of each wagon to lock the wheels, and Sarah remembered that her husband drove almost every wagon to safe camp in the valley below.³²

An early snow flurry hastened the travelers on their way, and a day later they reached the Whitman mission where they remained three weeks resting and preparing for the last and perhaps most dangerous portion of their journey.³³ Leaving their wagons and stock with Dr. Whitman, the Owens family and others bought canoes and engaged Indians as river guides. Impassable sections of the Columbia River forced the women and

children to portage while the men ran the rapids. Several were lost to the swift currents of the Columbia River including a son of Jesse Applegate.³⁴

At Fort Vancouver the settlers were met by Dr. John McLoughlin, chief factor of the Hudson's Bay Company, and arrangements were made for the women and children to remain at the fort for three weeks while Tom Owens, John Hobson, George Summers, and a Mr. Holly canoed down to Astoria in search of land to claim. At Astoria the men met with James Birnie and Colonel John McClure of the Hudson's Bay Company, and they were directed to the Clatsop Plains where they established claims. Back at Fort Vancouver, Tom secured a loan of provisions which included seed and potatoes from Dr. McLoughlin. These goods would see the family through its first winter and would be repaid the following year. The Owens family boarded a canoe and proceeded down the Columbia to Astoria where they landed safely on Christmas day, 1843.³⁵

Thus ended the Owens family's six-month, two-thousand mile trek to the Pacific Northwest, a journey which would remain in the mind of three-year-old Betheria, enlivened by the telling and retelling of her parents over the years. After being embellished by the gentle exaggerations of time, these memories would stand alongside other family legends of Indian fighters, frontiersmen, and remarkable women to form a lasting impression--and an essential element--in the character of Betheria Owens.

Notes

¹Hubert Howe Bancroft, History of Oregon, 1834-1848, 2 vols. (San Francisco: The History Company Publishers, 1886), 1:393, hereafter referred to as Bancroft, History of Oregon. John McLoughlin, the Hudson's Bay Company administrator at Ft. Vancouver, reported that the company in 1843 consisted of approximately 875 men, women and children.

²Dorothy O. Johansen, Empire of the Columbia: A History of the Pacific Northwest (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1967), p. 165, hereafter cited as Johansen, Empire. Dr. Whitman was sent west by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) in 1834. The ABCFM represented Congregationalist, Presbyterian, and Dutch Reformed membership. After his initial survey in 1836 Whitman returned west with his bride Narcissa, Henry and Eliza Spalding, and layman William H. Gray. They established a mission on the site of what is now Fort Walla Walla in Washington state. Narcissa Whitman and Eliza Spalding were the first white women to make the continental crossing.

³John D. Unruh, Jr., The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1860 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), pp. 28-29, hereafter cited as Unruh, Plains Across. Numerous propagandists extolled the virtues of the frontier west. Among the most notable and persistent was the New England educator Hall J. Kelley.

⁴Dr. Bethenia Owens-Adair saved a variety of materials in journals which were passed on to her family. These journals contain letters, pictures, news clippings, comments, and texts of lectures in addition to other items of interest to the historian. Volumes 2 and 3 are held by John Adair of Corvallis, Oregon; and Volume 4 is held by Mrs. Marjorie Adair Leback of Astoria, Oregon. Hereafter these will be cited as Journal 2, 3, or 4. Journal 4 contains a description of Beth Owens at age three which appears in a newspaper article by journalist Fred Lockley dated June 9, 1914. In this article Bethenia described her appearance as a child as having "black hair and eyes" and "full of life." She praised the courageous efforts of her parents during the long trip west and recalled memories of Jesse Applegate who became her lifelong friend.

⁵Bancroft, History of Oregon, p. 396. Jesse Applegate, an exceptionally literate member of the pioneer train, was elected to lead what became known as the cow column. In his own memoir "A Day in the Life of the Cow Column" which appears in Maude Rucker, The Oregon Trail and Some of its Blazers (New York: Walter Neale, 1930), chapter V, Applegate remarked that it was difficult to direct or control so large a body of people as those assembled in the 1843 party so the train was divided into two groups. The cow column consisted of slower moving wagons and livestock.

⁶In her autobiography, Bethenia A. Owens-Adair, Dr. Owens Adair: Some of her Life Experiences (Portland, Oregon: Mann & Beach, Printers, 1906), p. 283, hereafter cited as Owens-Adair, Life, Bethenia discusses the friendship of her family and Jesse Applegate. She says that he "nursed me as a babe, and carried me on his brawny shoulders for many miles over those rough, almost endless emigrant trails." Over the years Bethenia came to view Applegate as a father figure saying that it was his custom to address her as "my child."

⁷Oscar Osburn Winther, The Great Northwest (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), pp. 123-24, hereafter cited as Winther, Great Northwest.

⁸Elwood Evans et al., History of the Pacific Northwest: Oregon and Washington (Portland: North Pacific Publishing Co., 1889), p. 500, hereafter cited as Evans, History of the Pacific Northwest.

⁹S. J. Clarke, Oregon: Pictorial and Biographical (Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1912), p. 467, hereafter cited as Clarke, Oregon.

¹⁰Owens-Adair, Life, p. 141. This incident regarding Mr. Damron is supported by Oregon author Eva Emery Dye who wrote to Bethenia in 1906 that she had recounted the event in her book The Conquest. See Owens-Adair, A Souvenir (Salem, Oregon: Statesman Publishing Co., 1922, p. 22).

¹¹William A. Bowen, The Willamette Valley: Migration and Settlement on the Oregon Frontier (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978), p. 19, hereafter cited as Bowen, The Willamette Valley. Milksickness or puking fever was caused by "eating the tainted milk or meat of animals poisoned by the white snakeroot, Eupatorium ageratoides."

¹²Bethenia Owens-Adair wrote this sketch of her mother Sarah Damron Owens 1 August 1897 for her series on "Pioneer Women of Oregon" for the Astoria, Oregon, Daily Astorian (see p. 6). This article appeared in an edited version in Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 140-161 along with eighteen other sketches of pioneer women Dr. Owens-Adair had known and admired.

¹³Evans, History of the Pacific Northwest, p. 500.

¹⁴Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 143-44.

¹⁵In Bowen, The Willamette Valley, pp. 18-20, the author discusses the numerous wasting illnesses prevalent in the Mississippi Valley area. At the time the Owens family resided there were scarlet fever, measles, smallpox, cholera, malaria, and pulmonary tuberculosis. Bethenia's recollections do not specify the ailments her family endured, but she does imply that this was the primary motivation for moving.

¹⁶Bancroft, History of Oregon, p. 393.

¹⁷Bowen, The Willamette Valley, p. 18.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁹In Maude Rucker, The Oregon Trail and Some of its Blazers (New York: Walter Neale, 1930), see plate facing p. 35. Jesse Applegate's letter to his brother Lisbon dated April 11, 1843, revealed his fear that Senator Lewis F. Linn's bill passed in 1843 authorizing construction of a line of forts from the Missouri River to the west would cause a land rush. Hereafter this author is cited as Rucker, Oregon Trail.

²⁰Bancroft, History of Oregon, p. 393.

²¹The importance of family migrations in opening up the west is discussed in Unruh, Plains Across, p. 5. Another recent study of the overland trail experience and one that emphasizes the experience of women and families is John Mack Faragher, Women and Men on the Overland Trail (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

²²See the Daily Astorian, 1 August 1897, p. 6.

²³The chapter "A Day With the Cow Column" by Jesse Applegate in Rucker, Oregon Trail, p. 71, remains a classic account of the tedious, hard work involved in moving a company of wagons ten to fifteen miles across uncharted territory each day.

²⁴Ibid., p. 71.

²⁵Evans, History of the Pacific Northwest, p. 500.

²⁶See the Daily Astorian, 1 August 1897, p. 6.

²⁷Sarah Damron Owens gave a straightforward description of the tedium and pleasures of the long journey west. See Owens-Adair, Life, p. 146.

²⁸Johansen, Empire, p. 165.

²⁹Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 146-47.

³⁰Unruh, Plains Across, p. 157.

³¹See the Daily Astorian, 1 August 1897, p. 6.

³²Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 148-49.

³³The main body of immigrants in 1843 arrived in the Grande Ronde Valley on October 1, according to Bancroft, History of Oregon, p. 401. On October 2, two inches of snow whitened the mountainsides warning the travelers that winter was fast approaching.

³⁴Evans, History of the Pacific Northwest, p. 501.

³⁵See Horace S. Lyman, History of Oregon (New York: The North Pacific Publishing Company, 1903), p. 376, hereafter cited as Lyman, Oregon, for a description of Dr. John McLoughlin's role in assisting the early settlers. During a meeting of the Oregon Pioneer Association in 1874, J. W. Nesmith characterized Dr. John McLoughlin as a "public benefactor" who furnished the settlers of 1843 with goods from his own private resources. Matthew Deady, at the same meeting, proclaimed that Dr. John McLoughlin had done more than anyone else to preserve the order, peace, and goodwill in the territory.

CHAPTER II

THE CLATSOP PLAINS: 1843-1853

The history of homesteading in the West is mixed with success and failure. Tom and Sarah Owens possessed no guarantee of the future when they arrived on the Clatsop Plains on Christmas Day, 1843. Betherenia was just two months short of her fourth birthday, and more than likely she was more concerned with finding comfort against the cold winter winds blowing off the Columbia River than thinking of the future as her parents would have been. Tom Owens was gambling that the land he had chosen on one of the westernmost landfalls on the Pacific Coast would yield the health and good fortune which had eluded his family during their farming ventures east of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. The Owens family's decade on the Clatsop Plains is the shared struggle of parents and children working together on land where ploughs had never made a furrow and where the ring of the settler's axe was a seldom occurrence. For the Owenses and the several other families attracted to that remote area it was as if the clock had been turned back many years to a pre-industrial existence where each item necessary for subsistence was produced within the family unit or bartered or borrowed from the minuscule community of frontiersmen who shared their adventure. From the pioneering heritage of her westward-moving ancestors and the promise of the Oregon Country, Betherenia Angelina Owens' future and character were shaped.

Between 1841 and 1843, the date when Tom Owens and the large group of settlers who comprised the Great Migration arrived in Oregon, there had been periodic meetings to discuss provisional government. Although the frontier had minimal governing institutions, no American official had general jurisdiction over the growing population in the Oregon country. The Methodists had chosen a justice of the peace and a constable in 1838. Across the Columbia River at Fort Vancouver, the Hudson's Bay Company governed British subjects, mostly its own employees and pensioners. In 1843, the Reverend Elijah White, a sub-Indian agent, arrived in the Willamette Valley to supervise relations between Indian tribes and United States citizens. By 1843, the need to establish a rudimentary government had drawn a group of settlers to Champoeg, and by the following year the office of governor had been established along with a legislature and courts. This government operated as a voluntary compact, lacking connection to either British or American governments, with a general jurisdiction until Governor Joseph Lane was commissioned under the Territorial Act of August 14, 1848.¹

Under the provisions of the new government's Organic Act, Thomas Owens and other newly arrived settlers in the Oregon Country took up claims on the Clatsop Plains near Astoria.² The first settlers on the Plains were Solomon Smith and his Indian wife Celiast who had established a store and ferry at Skipanon in 1840.³

By the time the Owens family landed at Tansy Point in 1843 the population on the Clatsop Plains comprised only six white families residing in the isolated area south of what is now Astoria. The arrival of new settlers to the area brought out the unofficial welcoming

committee of the Reverend J. L. Parrish, Eldridge Trask, and W. T. Perry. The Perry and Trask families had spent their first winter in the Oregon Country at Oregon City and had arrived on the Clatsop Plains only a few months ahead of the Owenses. Earlier that spring the two men had built a house together on the Perry homestead near Solomon and Celiast Smith. Eldridge Trask, a trapper before settling down to farming, was an early-day booster who delighted in welcoming newcomers and helping them get settled on their claims.

The first few weeks on the Clatsop Plains were filled with making arrangements for a dwelling for the Owens family and with the hustle-bustle of three families of men, women, and children getting acquainted--a pleasant interlude before months of loneliness and isolation which would follow. A few days prior to the arrival of the Owenses, Mrs. Trask had given birth to twins, Martha and Harriet, and her sister, Ann Perry, had her own newborn Mary, born in October. Although she had homesteaded before, Sarah Owens had never experienced such deprivation as she now faced. Thomas had been forced to borrow seed and potatoes from Dr. McLoughlin at the Hudson's Bay Company, as was customary with most of the new settlers, and the family faced its first winter in a new cabin with only the bare essentials for life. Thus, the first merry days of visiting and making new friends gave way, Sarah said, to "the most unhappy period of my life." Owing to their late arrival, the responsibilities that Sarah normally supervised--the dairy, the chicken flock and small animals, and the garden patch--would have to wait until spring. Inside the cabin there was no wool or cotton to spin and weave, no candles to make, or soap to render. Sarah was pregnant with her

fourth child, so she did what she could to make the cabin comfortable, chinking the logs with clay and dried ferns. Each day she prepared the same monotonous diet of salmon and potatoes all the while longing for some scraps of cloth to sew. More than anything, she needed a fragment of cloth for a dishrag and to her great delight, Mrs. Parrish arrived one day with a small sack of rags. "I never received a present before nor since that I so highly appreciated as I did those rags," she said. When a second son was born that spring, Sarah and Tom named him Josiah Parrish to honor the family name of the kindly neighbor who had provided a sack of rags to sew on through the long days of that first Oregon winter.⁴

In the spring, Sarah resumed her outdoor work. Farm wives typically tended a large garden plot near their cabins which supplied the family's food for most of the year. Sarah tilled her garden plot with a hoe which Tom made for her. In order to reach the subsoil she cut through the sod with an axe and removed it in squares, cultivating the subsoil with the hoe and with her hands until it was pulverized. In addition to garden vegetables she followed her Good Friday custom of planting some precious flax seeds which she had brought with her from "the states." This planting represented the first flax brought into the Oregon Country and later became a lucrative cash crop for the industrious housewife.⁵ Sarah's first small crop flourished in the rich soil of the Clatsop Plains, and she harvested it with great care, saving every seed which yielded about one quart, for planting the following season. When the flax was ripened, Sarah pulled it, tied it in bundles, and laid it in a small lake nearby to undergo the rotting process.

Thomas had made her some tools to work the flax, and when she had dressed it there was enough floss to pad two quilts and another large mass which she said was "the finest fiber" she had ever seen.⁶ The Indians found Sarah's flax a superior material for fish netting, and she exchanged around fifteen barrels of fine Chinook salmon for her flax.

Barter was typically the first medium of exchange for those who settled early in the Oregon Country since few had the cash to exchange for necessities. Most arrived without cash or supplies so that it was not only vital to begin promptly to produce food and goods for family use, it was often necessary to use one's surplus as a bartering medium for items the family needed.⁷

During his first two winters in Oregon, Tom made fence rails which he exchanged with the Parrishes for provisions. For example, it took 300 rails to acquire a pig which the family carefully reared in a pen Tom made from a flour barrel. During the first winter, when everyday necessities seemed like luxuries, Sarah made bread from wheat ground in a coffee mill. By adding mashed potato to this mixture, Sarah could offer the bread-like cake to her family as a supplement to its monotonous diet of salmon and potatoes.

Bartering, sharing, and giving a helping hand to newcomers was a common practice on the frontier where, it seemed, everyone had a common share in survival. In addition to McLoughlin's help, many early settlers on the Clatsop Plains had also been supplied with seed potatoes by James Birnie the Hudson's Bay Company agent in Astoria, in 1843. When it came time to return his loan the following year, Tom set out across Young's Bay in a canoe loaded with potatoes. Unfortunately, he

was caught in a storm, the canoe overturned, and he lost everything. Later that spring, Tom and several others from the Clatsop Plains returned to Walla Walla to reclaim their wagons and the stock left the previous winter. The party proceeded down to The Dalles where Hobson and Holly took charge of the stock and drove them across the Cascade Mountains, down to Tillamook, and on to the Clatsop Plains.⁸ Tom and W. C. Summers made a raft to accommodate the four wagons, their goods, and Ann Hobson, John's daughter. They floated downriver to the Cascades where they transported their goods overland. The raft was shattered on the rocks so Tom obtained two large canoes, placed a platform between them catamaran style, and continued on to Clatsop Point where he and his passengers landed safely.⁹

During the month that Thomas was gone, Sarah was persuaded by her friends, Mrs. Trask and Mrs. Perry, to keep them company while the men were away. Indians were numerous both on the Clatsop Plains and north of the Columbia River near Chinook Point and Shoalwater Bay, and relations between them and the settlers had been peaceful. Nevertheless, the women were cautious when left unprotected. On one occasion the women were startled by scratching and whispering at the cabin door late in the evening. Two terrified Indian women begged Sarah to be let in. The Indians said the men at their lodge were all drunk and had run them off. Sarah and her friends allowed the women to stay, but the incident made a significant impact on Beth. As an adult she would speak and write on the consequences of alcohol and its detrimental effects on family life.¹⁰

In the early years of settlement husband, wife, and children all cooperated in the endless task of clearing and ploughing land in order to provide food for the family. By 1845 Tom had managed to bring six acres of wheat and an acre of potatoes under cultivation. Sarah's days comprised a relentless round of drudgery--managing the children, the household, livestock, and garden. Six-year-old Beth tended the younger children including Jane, born in 1846. Diana, ten, could assist with the housekeeping, food preparation and washing. Still, Sarah had to find time to spin and weave material to sew into clothing, tend the kitchen garden, and barter for items which could not be produced on the farm. Each day cows had to be milked and butter churned, a task which occupied several hours, and chickens and other small animals fed and watched. With this continuous daily grind of household and barnyard tasks Sarah had little time for socializing. A woman's only opportunity to visit usually came in the context of useful work. Sarah found such an outlet and turned it into a profitable venture by recruiting the Trask and Perry women and their children in a successful venture to supply surplus dried cranberries to the San Francisco market, receiving from ten to twelve dollars a barrel.¹¹

With more land under cultivation and crops flourishing, Tom, Eldridge Trask, W. T. Perry and Calvin Tibbets built a grist mill near the mouth of the Ohanna Creek. It was the first grist mill on the Clatsop Plains and during the summer of 1845 Thomas was absent frequently during its building. It was during one of these absences that potatoes and wheat which Tom had set aside as repayment for a loan of supplies advanced by Dr. McLoughlin were stolen.

The following year, an Indian known as Spuckem, whom Owens had suspected of the theft, appeared at the Owens place. Spuckem forced his way into the cabin, began building a fire despite Sarah's warning that her husband would be angry. Spuckem replied defiantly that Owens was a "cloochman,"--in Chinook jargon--only "a woman." But he moved outside and with several companions made camp nearby. Sarah, Diana and Beth though frightened, stood guard with shotgun and rifle, and by early morning the renegades had slipped away. When the Indians returned for a confrontation, Tom "caught his axe from the block and hurled it at him with great force." The injured Indian rode off vowing to kill Tom. Fear of the marauding renegades prompted the settlers to call a meeting at Captain R. W. Morrison's to discuss protection. Probably because of his previous experience as a lawman in Kentucky, Tom was chosen first sheriff of the Clatsop Plains.¹²

Tom's next encounter with Spuckem was in the line of duty. As sheriff he was called to detain Spuckem for questioning after some Clatsop Indians identified Spuckem as the man who had killed Cal Tibbets' bullock. Owens and Lewis Taylor had been questioning Spuckem when the Indian turned on them with a knife. As Spuckem rushed Tom with a "dirk-knife," the sheriff dropped back a few paces, aimed, and fired a fatal shot. The wounded Indian dropped his weapon and retreated across the hills to his lodge where he later died. The Indians and settlers investigated the matter and agreed that sheriff Owens' action was justified; however, tribal custom demanded tribute. The Indians failed to appear at a council the settlers arranged, and later a party of about fifteen Indians smeared with war paint rode up to the Owens homestead.

Sarah guarded the frightened children with a shotgun while Tom met the war party with a rifle crooked in his arm. The Indians told sheriff Owens they wanted blankets, not war, and after a lengthy bargaining the terms were settled, and a peace pipe was passed.¹³

Later, Cal Tibbets wrote to the Oregon Spectator to explain that sheriff Owens' actions were justified. He said that Owens shot the Indian in self-defense after both Owens and Lewis Taylor had been attacked. Tibbets wanted to make it clear to the settlement that the Indian had not been shot for the "modest compensation of a Spanish" cow as reported in a previous issue of the Oregon Spectator. In fact, he said, some of his neighbors had wanted to employ "frontier justice" by taking the matter into their own hands, but Owens had argued for a fair trial.¹⁴ Relations with the gradually declining native population over the next few years were peaceful.

1847 was a prosperous year for Tom Owens and his family. Tom purchased a herd of about sixty-five "Spanish cattle" from Robert Shortess. The skittish beasts proved to be a challenge. Eventually Sarah learned to milk the vicious animals, but in the beginning Tom stood by with a club while she worked. Ten cows were broken and put into production and their butter brought from fifty cents to \$1.50 a pound. The following year Tom introduced the first sheep on the Clatsop Plains, bringing two ewes and a buck from Fort Vancouver. This venture also proved successful and the flock gradually increased. The farm was now producing milk and butter, wool, and flax.¹⁵

While Tom Owens was prospering, Oregon farmers in general were suffering a depression during 1847-48 due to unmarketable surpluses of

wheat. The situation was relieved by the demands of the California gold rush. Although two-thirds of Oregon's able-bodied men sought their fortunes in California, those who stayed behind, like the Clatsop farmers and stock raisers, made excellent profits supplying wheat, cattle, wood, and produce. Fresh produce and dairy products were in great demand and the ambitious settlers on the Clatsop Plains decided that there was profit to be made from their excess harvests.¹⁶

In order to deal with their surplus products, Thomas and his friends Trask, Perry, Tibbets, and R. S. McEwan decided in the spring of 1848 to build a two-masted schooner on the coast at Skipanon in order to ship goods to California. The forty-ton ship was finished in 1849 greatly aided by the expertise of McEwan who had been a master ship-builder in New Brunswick.¹⁷ The California-bound cargo consisted of dried and salt salmon, potatoes, butter, cranberries, vegetables, and skins. McEwan was chosen captain of "The Pioneer." The venture was a great success with both ship and cargo sold in San Francisco at "great profit."¹⁸

The early years of homesteading--raising a house, clearing land, and planting fields--eventually gave way to a less frantically paced existence. Betherenia's earliest memories of the Clatsop Plains were as a nurse and nannie for the younger children. Betherenia said that her arms were seldom empty as she took responsibility for the babies so that her mother and older sister could be free for other tasks. In addition to the continuous house and farm drudgery Sarah had to cope with the ever present pregnancy and newborn infant which seemed to arrive at regular intervals.¹⁹ Betherenia said that her exhausted mother had little time to

devote to any of the children except to nurse them. To make things easier for "the little nurse" Thomas built a "rude little sled" in which Bethenia could tow the baby. Thus Bethenia and her charges bumped along with Josiah on one hip and Flem grasping at her skirts. When it rained Bethenia and her troupe would stay in the barn where they could swing, play, and climb to the top of the haymow and slide down. Diana, four years older than Bethenia, was content to remain close to Sarah learning domestic skills. While Diana "never seemed to care much for play" and much preferred patching quilts, Bethenia preferred a good romp with brother Flem. Though Flem was two years younger and much larger, Bethenia took pride in the fact that she regularly threw him down during wrestling. On one occasion Flem challenged her to a tumble to see who would have to run to the barn for a bundle of oats for Thomas' house. Bethenia and Flem pushed and nudged until Bethenia was flung to the floor, chipping her tooth on a chair as she fell. Flem, stunned at his victory, fled to the barn in shame. Bethenia bore the reminder of her first defeat for more than eighteen years until the chip was finally repaired by a Portland dentist. But in spite of their regular matches, Bethenia and Flem were devoted, admiring companions. There was no double standard on the Owens farm. Bethenia was active in play and also a hard worker proud that she was a "tom-boy" and even glorying in the fact. She often did a boy's work and said it was her father's pleasure to call her his "boy."²⁰ Later Bethenia said it was the "regret of my life up to the age of thirty-five years that I was not born a boy, for I realized early in life that a girl was hampered and hemmed in on all sides, simply by the accident of sex."²¹

Bethenia's vigorous curiosity sometimes got her in trouble especially when she sought to combine work and play. Her favorite pastime was hunting hen's nests, scrambling about the farmyard and barn. On one occasion her quest for the elusive nests precluded caution and she found herself firmly wedged into a narrow space under the barn floor with no escape. As she lay calculating how long it would take to clear the barn of tons of hay so that her father could rescue her, she finally managed to wriggle free and resolved to hunt with more care in the future.²² Such adventures tend to picture homesteading on the remote Clatsop Plains as idyllic. A more realistic evaluation of the tasks and play during those years show that survival depended on the contributions of each family member. It appears that strict observation of stereotypical roles often lapsed in favor of a frontier egalitarianism which did much to shape Bethenia's self-image and character. As baby nurse and farmhand she was appreciated by both her parents. And her father's approval and celebration of her strength and ability served to expand her expectations rather than limit them to what might have seemed more appropriate activities for a girl. Therefore Bethenia met the hardships of frontier life uncritically and with a particular zest. Her interest did not lie solely in mastering domestic skills but also in matching and challenging her brother Flem or emulating the energetic Ann Hobson who treated her as an "especial pet." Miss Hobson's impressive outdoor expertise enabled her to "row or sail a boat equal to a Columbia River fisherman...and...manage a canoe with all the skill of a Chinook Indian." It was Ann who taught Bethenia horsemanship as they galloped across the prairie in pursuit of the fierce Spanish cattle which roamed

the Owens farm.²³ Thus Bethenia's formative years were spent criss-crossing the roles traditionally played by both boys and girls. She matured early in a society which did not frown on atypical women, but accepted their skills as necessary to the work of achieving success under difficult conditions.

By the time Bethenia approached her tenth birthday, the Clatsop Plains was a farflung but expanding community of about 1,000 people. Like many of its frontier counterparts there had been moves to restructure some of the institutions the settlers had left behind in the States. In the earliest stages of community building settlers did not press for the development of free public education but a minority of pioneers did work to ensure that their children would at least be exposed to the moral, religious, and educational values of the customary nineteenth-century curriculum. The first organized schools in Oregon appeared at Wheatland in Yamhill County and at the Indian Mission organized by Jason Lee near Salem in the early 1830s.²⁴ When the first two school districts were established on the Clatsop Plains, they were organized under the leadership of Thomas Owens. Some of his neighbors met with him at his home on February 25, 1851, to set boundaries and work out the details of administering the schools. The following summer the Owens children attended a three-month term arranged by Thomas who brought the schoolmaster, a Mr. Beaufort, to their home to board. The school was met with much excitement in a community where school books were rare and opportunities for education non-existent. The pupils ranged from about four to fifteen years of age and those who attended were still expected to do a full day's farm work in addition to their

studies.²⁵ Beaufort, who probably was not much older than most of his pupils, was admired by the elders as well as the children. However, he showed little inclination to mix with the district's young men which eventually caused him trouble. Twelve-year-old Bethenia declared herself fascinated by his manners, intellect, and good looks--all qualities that naturally set him apart from the backwoods youth who now expressed their resentment of the outsider by making jokes at his expense. He good-naturedly endured the teasing but by the end of summer was ready to test the provincials in a competition pitting his skills against theirs. To sweeten the contest Beaufort put up his watch and chain and two hundred dollars in cash against one hundred dollars and whatever his opponents wished to put up that he could dig, measure, and stack more potatoes than any man on Clatsop Plains. The terms were set at sixty bushels, and it was agreed that Beaufort could select the ground.

Beaufort's reckless challenge aroused the pride of the rural men, and the bets flowed. Thomas, who knew the schoolmaster to be "as strong as a bear and as active as a cat" warned his farmhand Legrand Hill not to fool his summer's work away, but Hill stubbornly bet his watch and two hundred bundles of oats on the match. Word spread throughout the community, and on the day of the contest a large turnout, "including Indians," prepared to stay the day and watch the fun at "Mr. Jewett's potato patch, near the county road."²⁶ At the appointed hour Beaufort arrived, removed his coat, vest, and a "long, handsome blue silk Spanish scarf" and hung them on the fence. His work outfit consisted of moccasins and buckskin gloves which he fitted carefully over his "soft white

hands." Then he set to work quickly and smoothly uncovering the hills of potatoes with a special hoe which he had cut short for easier digging. At the end of the first hour Betherenia said that the audience knew that Beaufort would come out the winner. By nightfall the young teacher had "raked in watches, rings, scarf-pins and about all the spare money the young men and some of the old ones in that settlement possessed."

With the school term finished and his stunning victory at the potato patch behind him, Beaufort bid the Owens family farewell. Betherenia "tried to keep back" her tears as the teacher said goodbye to Thomas and Sarah and each of the children. When he came to Betherenia he remarked to Sarah that he thought he might take the child with him. Sarah answered, "All right, she is such a tom-boy I can never make a girl of her anyway." Betherenia tagged along as far as the teacher would allow and he finally told her she must go home. "You are a nice little girl," he said, "and some day you will make a fine woman; but you must remember and study your book hard...and don't forget your teacher, will you?" Those words etched themselves in the child's memory and whenever she felt rebellious she would remember her teacher and wish fervently that she had been allowed to follow him.

The theme of the outsider who bilks the rubes at their own game is a classic legend in American folklore which seems to stretch the reader's imagination. Nevertheless, Betherenia continued to retell the tale and this seems to attest to the special identity she felt for the teacher whose intellectual powers and patient perseverance gave him the confidence to endure a difficult situation ending up the victor. The

summer-long acquaintance had made such a lasting imprint on the child's mind that she later would incorporate these admired ideals among her own methods of solving problems.²⁷

The disappointment over losing her schoolteacher was soothed by her confidante, one Mrs. McCrary, a childless neighbor who lived about a quarter mile from the Owens homestead. Mrs. McCrary had enchanted Betheria with her kindness and the praises and assurance she offered her high-strung little neighbor. Mrs. McCrary was "quite a little older" than Sarah, who was about thirty years old at the time, and very different in physique and temperament. Betheria described her as tall and fair with gray eyes while Sarah was petite with dark hair and eyes. Sarah was a neat and orderly housekeeper, but Betheria described in detail the woman she came to love as a mother. Her hair was combed smoothly back from a high, prominent forehead, and she wore a white kerchief crossed and pinned smoothly across her bosom. Her long, checked apron was "ironed without one wrinkle, fastened trimly about her waist." Betheria's devotion to Mrs. McCrary was rewarded with "many scoldings for running off" to her "without permission." Nevertheless Betheria continued to steal away to her friend's house whenever possible. At Mrs. McCrary's buttons were replaced on Betheria's apron and dress, her long hair was let loose and brushed out so that they could admire it in the looking glass, and lessons in needlework and cooking were enjoyed in a leisurely, uncritical manner. When Betheria made mistakes Mrs. McCrary corrected her with such delicacy that her "super-sensitive nature was never wounded." Perhaps the most important thing that Mrs. McCrary gave to Betheria was the time and attention which

Sarah was unable to devote to her second daughter. Thus, the scant year which she spent in the companionship of Mrs. McCrary was woefully short. Later Bethenia said that had she been under the influence of that "wise good woman" until reaching maturity that she might have escaped many of the sorrows and hardships of her life. As often was the case on the frontier, Mrs. McCrary's husband located a better farm in another district and the couple left Clatsop Plains.²⁸

Bethenia's idealization of the character of Mr. Beaufort and Mrs. McCrary appears to be an extension of the qualities she admired most in her parents. Mr. Beaufort could have been a younger version of her father--intelligent, dashing, persuasive. Mrs. McCrary mirrored the feminine attributes of Sarah, but she was also patient, sympathetic and a willing partner in Bethenia's childhood fantasizing. Bethenia's parents provided stability and love and her friends allowed her to dream of a life beyond the drudgery of farm work. Thus it is not surprising that as Bethenia matured she found the local boys lacking. One suitor, "a diminutive, stuttering" Welshman, who persisted in seeking her attention, cornered her while she was tending a steaming washtub of clothes at an outside fire. Bethenia seized a broom handle and beat the man as hard as she could with the warning that should he come near her again she would kill him. She had no intention of flirting with hired hands and probably found little to interest her in the other local boys, but yet her family's status and wealth designated her as an extremely desirable marriage partner. Bethenia might have thought that the life of a farm wife offered little compensation for one who still enjoyed the fairy stories of childhood; however, the options open to her were

virtually non-existent. Attractive young women like Diana, the "Clatsop Beauty," and Betherenia, though destined to be farmer's wives, probably had some choice in the matter even though the pressure on them to marry early was great. Diana, always more inclined to accept her domestic role, presented a striking contrast to her pretty, spirited younger sister who drove off her suitors with broomsticks.²⁹ Perhaps Betherenia perceived the duties of a farm wife with its strenuous daily grind such a loathsome contrast to the fancies of childhood that she wished to delay the inevitable customs of socializing, courtship, and marriage. However, young women like Betherenia had few options, and the models available to her seemed to suggest that fortune smiles on those who conformed. By 1851 Diana had found her niche in a happy marriage to John Hobson of Astoria. John was the son of William Hobson, an English immigrant who had traveled cross country with the Owens in 1843.³⁰

By 1853 Thomas and Sarah Owens had been so successful in their farm that Thomas was making plans to move. He had heard encouraging news from friends in southern Oregon that land was plentiful and his 640-acre farm no longer provided grassland sufficient for his growing herds of cattle, sheep, and horses. As he had done before, Thomas constructed a large flatboat on which to move his family and their belongings. After fall harvest Thomas shipped more than a hundred head of cattle and horses upriver to St. Helens and then returned to Clatsop where he made final arrangements for lease of the farm. The flatboat was sold at Portland, and the family made ready for the trip down the Willamette Valley to their new home in southern Oregon.³¹

Predictably, Betheria made no mention of any regret at leaving Clatsop Plains. Instead she looked forward to the adventure, meeting the challenge of travel in new territory with her usual enthusiasm. The early miles were difficult as they plodded through dense timbered stretches in relentless rains. Thomas and Sarah both drove wagons and John Hobson and some herders moved on ahead with the cattle and horses. When they emerged onto the open trails of the grassy Willamette Valley Hobson turned north for Astoria and Betheria and Flem and a hired man assumed the task of driving the animals. Betheria was proud of her ability to work the stock and she declared that the hired man was not "half equal for either one of us for the purpose." Thomas agreed that his two children were worth "more than any two men" he could have hired.³² The little caravan moved slowly and uneventfully along their path and when they reached Deer Creek, later known as Roseburg (after its founder Aaron Rose), they were welcomed by their old friends from Clatsop, the Perrys who had a house ready for them.³³

In the decade of the 1840s Thomas and Sarah had carved a rich future for themselves and their seven children out of the fertile soil of Clatsop Plains. The gamble of 1843 had paid rich rewards for the perseverance and wise management of both husband and wife. Sarah's careful direction of the vital domestic industry equalled in importance Tom's wise stewardship of land and livestock. Even the smallest of children learned to be productive rather than dependent once they had passed the stage of infancy. And in the process, sex roles were brushed aside in favor of accomplishing tasks and lending help when and where needed. Nevertheless, the passing of the first stages of community

building saw a realignment of roles and priorities as the institutions and customs left behind or disregarded on the raw frontier were reintroduced.³⁴ Even the most "tomboyish" girls--like Bethenia--would bend to the subtle pressures of society and little by little attempt the manners and attitudes expected of young females.

The move from the Clatsop Plains and the culmination of the Owens family's successful pioneering marked the last days of Bethenia's childhood. The part she played in this venture would remain in her memory and strongly influence the course of her future actions.

Notes

¹Earl Pomeroy, The Pacific Slope: A History of California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Utah, and Nevada (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), pp. 56-60, hereafter cited as Pomeroy, Pacific Slope.

²When the provisional government at Champoeg adopted the Organic Act of 1843, a provision allowed males to claim up to 640 acres free. Rules for land acquisition are found in William G. Loy, Atlas of Oregon (Portland, Oregon: Durham & Downey, Inc., for the University of Oregon, 1976), p. 8, hereafter cited as Loy, Atlas of Oregon.

³This history of early Clatsop County relies on a number of pioneer recollections for its primary source material. See Emma Gene Miller, Clatsop County, Oregon: A History (Portland, Oregon: Binford & Mort, 1958), p. 98, hereafter cited as Miller, Clatsop County.

⁴Owens-Adair, Life, p. 151.

⁵Miller, Clatsop County, p. 99.

⁶Owens-Adair, Life, p. 157.

⁷Bowen notes that the importance of a barter economy in which labor was exchanged for agricultural products and other goods cannot be overestimated, in The Willamette Valley, p. 67.

⁸John Hobson and a B. Holly were among the westering travelers of the Great Migration of 1843 according to Bancroft, History of Oregon, p. 501. This authority is recognized as the historian Frances Fuller Victor in John W. Caughey, Hubert Howe Bancroft: Historian of the West (New York: Russell & Russell, 1970, pp. 263-67. Caughey points out that Bancroft employed Victor to write this volume of his series and was later strongly denounced for failing to credit authorship.

⁹Evans, History of the Pacific Northwest, p. 501.

¹⁰Owens-Adair, Life, p. 151.

¹¹Ibid., p. 152.

¹²Thomas Owens was the first sheriff of Clatsop County, Oregon. He resigned his office on 26 December 1846, according to an announcement in the Oregon City Spectator, p. 3.

¹³Sarah Owens' account of this incident is found in her reminiscences in Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 151-52.

¹⁴The Oregon Spectator, 3 September 1846, p. 3.

¹⁵Owens-Adair, Life, p. 158.

¹⁶Loy, Atlas of Oregon, p. 58, and Pomery, Pacific Slope, p. 48.

¹⁷Lyman, Oregon, p. 122, and Miller, Clatsop County, p. 139. A similar shipbuilding incident was fictionalized by Don Berry in the novel Trask (Sausalito, California: A Comstock Edition, 1960).

¹⁸See Miller's version in Clatsop County, p. 138, and Owens-Adair, Life, p. 159, in which Sarah Damron Owens, Hannah Pegg Pease, p. 217, recall the ship building episode.

¹⁹United States Census for 1850, Manuscript Census Return for Clatsop County, Oregon (Microfilm in Special Collections, University of Oregon Library, Eugene, Oregon), hereafter cited as M.C.R. Clatsop County. The Census of 1850 for Clatsop County documents the regular arrival of infants in the Owens Family. From 1843 through 1850 there were four children born: Josiah Parrish, 1844, Jane, 1846, M. E. Mary, 1848 and S. (female), 1850. The other children were Diana, born 1836 in Kentucky; Betheria Angelina, 1840, Missouri, and J. F. (Flem), 1841, Missouri.

²⁰Evans, History of the Pacific Northwest, p. 502.

²¹Clarke, Oregon, p. 468.

²²Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 9-10.

²³Ibid., p. 473.

²⁴Loy, Atlas of Oregon, p. 38.

²⁵Owens-Adair, Life, p. 10.

²⁶Clarke, Oregon, p. 470.

²⁷Betheria's story about her schoolmaster appears with little alteration at least three times in print including the version in her autobiography, the "mugbook" narrative which she probably wrote for S. J. Clarke in Oregon, and a third time in the book she authored, Human Sterilization: Its Social and Legislative Effects (Self-published, n.p., 1922).

²⁸Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 15-17.

²⁹Demographic data compiled from the 1845 territorial census show a sexual imbalance in the population with an excess of men over 18 years old, in Bowen, The Willamette Valley, p. 13.

³⁰John Hobson and Diana Owens were married October 23, 1851, according to the marriage register in the Hobson family Bible. The

Hobson family's memorabilia and Bible are in the collection of Miss Marjorie Halderman of Astoria, Oregon, William Hobson's granddaughter. Miss Halderman resides in the home that William Hobson built in Astoria in 1863, a residence listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

³¹Evans describes the disposition of the farm and plans for relocation in History of the Pacific Northwest, p. 501. Miller, Clatsop County, p. 202, notes that of the nine wheat farmers operating on the Clatsop Plains in 1850 Tom Owens produced the most wheat--150 bushels. The M.C.R. Clatsop County, 1850, indicates that the Owens farm was valued at more than \$10,000. There were four farms valued in the \$10,000 range in the 1850 Census for Clatsop County in a district of 24 farms. Only one farmer, Robert Shortess, surpassed Owens in value with a worth of over \$20,000.

³²Owens-Adair, Life, p. 23.

³³Settlement at Deer Creek (Roseburg) began in the early 1850s predominantly on the South Umpqua River at its confluence with Deer Creek, hence the name, according to Loy, Atlas of Oregon, p. 51.

³⁴For a discussion of women's role in civilizing the frontier, see Julie Roy Jeffrey, Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), especially Chapter 4.

CHAPTER III

THE LOVER'S KNOT UNRAVELS: 1854-1858

Tom Owens' decision to settle at Deer Creek in southern Oregon was a well-considered move. A person only needed to look around at the "succession of hills and valleys..." with their "scattering of timber of different kinds" to know that the area was well situated. In addition to that, the whole valley was considered the "finest grazing country west of the Rocky Mountains."¹ Thus it appeared that Tom Owens' decision to resettle in the Umpqua Valley was calculated to bring success.

In 1847 the Territorial Legislature had commissioned Levi Scott and a company of men to improve the "South Road" through the Umpqua and Rogue River Valleys in anticipation of a surge of immigration. So it was this road that the Owens family traveled as they made their way South to their new home. Their old friends from Clatsop, the W. T. Perrys who had moved to Deer Creek in 1851, had done well. William Perry operated the grist mill there, and in 1852 he was appointed postmaster.²

Under the Donation Land Act of 1850 Tom Owens selected a 640-acre section of land on the South Umpqua River about one mile from what today is downtown Roseburg.³ Across the river to the east was the farm of Aaron Rose whose shrewd maneuverings in 1854 would prompt the voters to name Deer Creek the county seat. Shortly thereafter, the town was renamed Roseburg in his honor.⁴

Although the village was remote even by the standards of the 1850s, comprising only about a dozen families, the Owens family was pleased with their move. Tom made plans for a new house, selected a building site, and began hauling lumber across the river from town. Flem and Josiah helped him build a ferry at the crossing, and before long it became a good source of revenue.⁵ The convenient location of the ferry at the dangerous river crossing linked the western areas of the settlement to the center of Deer Creek's commercial sites and became a full-time business for the Owens men.

During the winter Legrand Hill who had worked on the Clatsop farm arrived at Deer Creek for a visit. It is not known whether Legrand had courted Betheria at Clatsop or if they had renewed their acquaintance. She states quite simply in her autobiography that "it was now arranged" that the couple would be married in the spring when the new Owens house was ready for occupancy.⁶

In the winter of her betrothment to Legrand Hill, Betheria was thirteen years old, but early marriage was common on the frontier. Remote townships like Deer Creek held few opportunities for women. Marriage and motherhood were considered proper occupations for women, and in almost every instance they were dependent on their fathers, brothers, or husbands for support and status. The few single or unmarried women who attempted to support themselves through schoolteaching, sewing, or as domestics were often the object of gossip, ridicule, or scandal. Furthermore, the 1850 federal census for Oregon demonstrated that males constituted almost sixty-one percent of the population, men outnumbering women three to one. Not only was there a disparity in the

proportion of men to women, there also was a "striking youthfulness" in the female population. The median age in Oregon for females was 12.9 years of age and in rural areas it was 12.3 years.⁷

Where single women were at a premium, early marriage was the rule in new communities. Early marriage also was an established precedent in the Owens family. Sarah married at sixteen and elder sister Diana at thirteen. Thus, it was not unusual that the Owenses would consent to the marriage of their daughter at an early age.⁸

One can only surmise as to the depth of Legrand Hill's involvement with Betherenia and why he sought to marry her. Her photographs reveal an attractive young woman with dark eyes and thick, curly black hair. Her ability to convey a certain authority makes her seem taller than five feet four inches. In addition to her physically pleasant attributes, Betherenia had a sharp wit, and a brisk manner in which she clearly stated her point of view. Her good looks and bright intellect undoubtedly were a sparkling combination, and her practical knowledge of a farm life and its tasks made her an excellent choice as a marriage partner.⁹ Legrand was living at the Owens farm in 1850, working as a laborer. He had arrived in the district late in 1849 and had worked at Hunt's Mill. Hannah Pegge Pease, a pioneer of 1849, remembered that Legrand had canoeed down to Oregon City with the overlanders. Their party included Mr. and Mrs. John Minto and a Mr. Judson, the owner of the Hunt Mill on the Lewis and Clark River.¹⁰ Thus it appears that the venturesome young Virginian had preceded his family to Oregon by at least four years, making his way on the frontier as laborer and mill hand. His family



THOMAS OWENS.



MRS. SARAH OWENS.



J.W.F. OWENS.



MRS. OWENS ADAIR M.D.
ASTORIA OR.

Figure 1. The Owens Family.

emigrated four years later, settling on a claim in southern Oregon near the Siskiyou Mountains in Jackson County.¹¹

Legrand was tall and healthy, a good marksman who preferred hunting small game to all other pursuits. He also liked to read novels and attend camp meetings and perhaps this bit of cultural attainment reminded Bethenia of the intellect and style of Mr. Beaufort, her first school teacher. Legrand had potential as a solid provider, should he decide to develop his considerable skills as a handyman and carpenter, and he was strong and healthy. It is also possible that at the age of twenty-five, Hill was ready to settle down, and the comfortable circumstances in the Owens household might have appeared quite attractive. If Hill was an opportunist, Bethenia's dowry and potential inheritance also would have presented an attractive impetus to marriage. Yet, no record exists depicting either party's intentions, and thus it might be assumed that the couple simply found each other mutually attractive, fell in love, and decided to marry.

Bethenia spent the next few months happily preparing a trousseau and making plans for her household needs. She carded wool, made linings, pieced quilts, sewed table and bed linens, and made herself two new calico dresses. Long before the wedding day she had neatly folded and packed away four quilts, two sets of sheets and pillow cases, two table cloths, and four towels. And together, she and Sarah fitted and sewed her wedding gown, a pretty "sky-blue figured lawn."¹²

To Bethenia everything seemed bright and beautiful and her "soul overflowed with love and hope." It was a "sweet, smiling spring"--the season she loved best. On May 4, 1854, she and Legrand recited their

wedding promises before the Reverend Thomas Stephens, a "Gospel Minister," and a congregation of her family and the Perrys.¹³

Legrand had leased a farm on credit, 360 acres of land about four miles from the Owenses who now were their only neighbors. The improvements on the farm were minimal, consisting of a ramshackle twelve-by-fourteen log cabin which had neither floor nor chimney. Legrand probably was eligible to claim a section of land under the Donation Land Law, but it is possible that by the time he was ready to settle the best land already had been claimed in that area. Apparently he was satisfied with his choice, especially since the farm already had twelve acres planted in oats and wheat. The farm had several outbuildings--a shed, milking corral, and calf pen--which would be suitable for housing the livestock which Thomas had given to Betheria as a wedding gift. These included a fine saddle mare, Queen, and a cow, calf, and heifer to start their dairy.

If the young bride was disappointed by the run-down state of the farm she concealed it with her customary optimism, noting that she had been "trained to work, and bred to thrift and economy, and everything looked bright and beautiful" to her. In fact, she considered this "an excellent start in life" owing to her parents' efforts to ensure the couple's success. Legrand's contribution to the union was modest--at the time of the marriage he possessed only a horse and saddle, gun, and less than twenty dollars--but Betheria had absolute faith in him. She believed that her husband "was the equal of any man living," and with that degree of faith she had high hopes for the future.¹⁴

In a buoyant mood she set to work improving their first home. Her first task was to fill the unchinked logs of the poorly constructed log hut with "mixed mud and grass" to give them protection from the elements, small animals, and vermin. The door was so low that Legrand had to stoop to enter, and it was fastened with the "proverbial latch and string." Betherenia's furniture consisted of a "pioneer bed"--rails driven into the log walls and held secure by a single leg--and a rough shelf standing on two slender logs for a table. Three smaller shelves became a cupboard for Betherenia's tinware. On these shelves she arranged her sugar bowl, cream jug, steel knives, and two-tined forks along with a set of German silver teaspoons which she had bought with her savings before she was married. The rest of her housewares had been a gift from her parents. Her selection of iron ware included such necessities as a cooking pot, tea kettle, bake oven, frying pan, and coffee pot. She also had a butter churn, six milk pans, a wash tub and board, a large iron pot for washing, and a water bucket and tin dipper. These items and a large box of groceries had been purchased on Thomas' account at the store the afternoon of her wedding. Sarah had also given her a good feather bed and pillows, a straw bed, a pair of blankets, and two extra quilts. With this excellent stock of housewares, groceries, and live-stock, the couple began their life together.¹⁵

The summer seemed especially beautiful to Betherenia that year as she busied herself in the house and tended a small garden next to the cabin. Thomas had advised his son-in-law to begin building a house to replace the shack but Legrand "was never in a hurry to get down to work." He avoided the task of housebuilding by diverting his energies on hunting

deer and grouse for the table. And when he was not hunting, Legrand persisted in "idling time away at camp meetings and reading novels." Gradually the warm summer days gave way to the chills of September and Legrand purchased a second-hand stove for \$2.50 which he installed in one corner of the cabin. The "inexpressible comfort" afforded by the luxurious new stove was short lived, for the first rainstorm brought torrents of water gushing up into the cabin. Their rustic hillside home was situated above a network of gopher holes and with the first rains the cabin floor gushed water like an underground spring. In order to keep from washing down the hillside they dug trenches around the cabin to channel the water away.¹⁶

By late November, Legrand had felled and notched enough logs for the new house. Thomas generously provided the rest of the building materials needed for the sixteen-by-twenty house. He arrived with a wagon loaded with two doors, two windows, shingles, nails, and rough, hand-planed timbers for the flooring. With all of the material assembled next to the old cabin, Thomas and Sarah called in the neighbors for a house-raising. This traditional pioneer activity provided the necessary hands for the bulk of the heavy construction and was a welcome social event which gave everyone a needed break from their customary work. The new house began to take shape under Thomas' experienced direction: framing went up, door openings were sawed, and spaces for windows were cut. The women brought out pies, cake, and bread and helped Bethenia with the dinner.¹⁷

The following day, Bethenia arose earlier than usual, milked and fed the livestock, and awakened Legrand early so that he could continue

working on the house. She "felt equal to almost any task" now, with a fine new house shaping up nicely alongside the old hut. Her enthusiasm carried them through two more days and then Legrand proposed that they take some time off for a hunt. The roof was only partially finished so Bethernia insisted that Legrand continue. He plodded along finishing half of the roof and nailing down enough of the flooring so that Bethernia could install the one-legged bed. Working alongside her husband, Bethernia drove nails into the logs for clothes hangers, and put down her prized braided rugs which she had made from scraps Sarah had given her. With great satisfaction she decided that "no young wife of unlimited wealth ever could have looked with more pride and pleasure on her rich velvet or Turkish rug."¹⁸

In the midst of Bethernia's delight, disaster struck. Legrand stopped laying floor in order to put in a door and had mashed his left thumb. All work stopped. The gaping roof and unfinished floor waited while Legrand nursed his hand. It was late November now, and Bethernia was still cooking their meals on the old stove in the hut next door because they lacked the money to purchase stove pipe for the new house. Bethernia knew that a man with "a perfect right hand and a willing wife" like herself could have finished the job but her husband was in no mood to debate the issue. Instead, he decided that they should board up the house for awhile and pay a visit to the Owens. Bethernia realized that her father did not approve of "shiftlessness" but had to consent because Legrand had begun to "exhibit temper" when she objected to his plans. When their two-week visit was over Thomas returned home with them bringing stove pipe and groceries. In time, Legrand finished the house.

They managed through the winter on what they could make from eggs and butter and when their note came due in the spring, there was no cash to pay the \$300 loan. Legrand was "handy with tools, and could have had work at good wages as a carpenter, at any time" but Bethenia had begun to believe that her husband lacked "industry." Their dilemma was solved when the owner of the land expressed interest in reclaiming the farm. He offered \$60 in cash for the improvements, and they gratefully accepted. Legrand had heard recently from his Jackson County relatives that they were prospering. There were also stories circulating about the new gold rush in the Siskiyous, and he was eager to visit his relations and confirm the news.¹⁹

On May 1, 1855, they left Roseburg with a pack train. Their first stop would be a visit with the Hill family in Jackson County, after which they would push on toward Yreka, California. Always hopeful, Bethenia began her second year of marriage convinced that an unlimited and bright future lay just ahead. As they rode off in pursuit of Legrand's dream she felt "quite rich in our worldly possessions of two horses, two cows, and one yearling heifer." After several months with the Hills Bethenia's spirits were somewhat dampened, and she became homesick. Since Legrand felt the cattle would be a burden on the mountainous trip over the Siskiyous he sold them and agreed that they should pay a final visit to the Owenses before they left for California. During the visit in Roseburg, Thomas approached Legrand about settling down. He used his own experience as an example, advising his son-in-law that "it does not take long for a few head of cattle to grow into money."²⁰ But Legrand had already sold the cattle--his fortune would

never be made in farming. His golden opportunity lay buried in the mountains and streams of California, and he was eager to be on his way. News of recent Indian unrest prompted Betheria and Legrand to band together with a large, almost festive assembly of horsemen, miners and packers. The party included twenty well-armed men but no incidents marred the trip and they arrived safely at Yreka in good time.²¹

Shortly after their arrival in Yreka, the Hills were visited by Legrand's Aunt, one Mrs. Kelly, a sister of his father. Mrs. Kelly and her husband had recently received news of the loss of their son in the Indian wars, and the presence of the young couple served to assuage some of Aunt Kelly's grief. She urged them to move into her home, reasoning that it wasn't safe for Betheria to be left home alone while Legrand was away. Yreka, at that time, was a typically wide-open mining village, and Aunt Kelly felt that there were too many "rough, drinking men" in the place. Aunt Kelly put Betheria to work, and before long Betheria had become an excellent seamstress. Aunt Kelly was an industrious moneymaker who turned a profit on her milk and eggs, pies, cakes, and shirts which brought three dollars apiece. Her only problem seemed to be in keeping her money, since she had a husband who "wheedled it out of her about as fast as she made it." However, this did not prevent Aunt Kelly from counseling Betheria to avoid the same mistake. For about eight years Legrand had lived with his aunt when he was a boy, therefore she felt within her rights advising and instructing him. So she told him he should stop fooling away everything the couple earned and think about finding a lot and building a home. Aunt Kelly feared that Legrand would squander Betheria's wages and the small nestegg she had saved from

the sale of her stock and wagon--a total of \$300. The matter became all the more urgent when Betheria discovered she was expecting a child in the spring. By March they had decided to use their \$300 as a downpayment on a one-room cottage located a block from Aunt Kelly's. They had barely moved into the tiny house when George was born on April 17, 1856. Immediately Aunt Kelly offered to adopt the child making him her heir and promising him an education. But Betheria loved her baby and felt he was far too precious to give up, even to well-meaning Aunt Kelly. It was true that Legrand had a "passion for trading and speculating," always coming out the loser, but perhaps the responsibility of a son would inspire him to get some steady occupation and settle down, reasoned Betheria.

These hopes for better times were soon dashed. Tension between Betheria and her husband began to mount following the birth of the baby. Legrand, who had always had a sharp temper, was now given to more violent outbursts which left Betheria concerned. Nevertheless, she decided to resume her work for Aunt Kelly, bringing the work to her own home so she could care for the baby, and in this way earned a good share of the groceries and household comforts. It does not appear that Betheria had women confidantes other than Aunt Kelly to guide her in personal matters, and Aunt Kelly's outlook was not very optimistic. She supported Betheria in such matters as keeping Queen, the prize riding mare, but the horse was costing money for pasturage and had become a "bone of contention" in the already financially strained household.²² Thus it appears that economic pressures and the adjustment to parenthood were causing unbearable strain on the marriage. Aunt Kelly's warning

that Legrand probably would "fool around all his life, and never accomplish anything," must have further served to dishearten the normally optimistic Bethenia.²³

When the news of their daughter's hand-to-mouth existence reached Thomas and Sarah they left the older children in charge and headed for Yreka arriving unexpectedly one midsummer day. They had been especially anxious to see their new grandchild, they told Bethenia, but the real motive was to get the couple to return to Roseburg. Thomas discussed how much Roseburg had expanded since Bethenia and Legrand had left two years ago, describing the availability of carpentry work in the growing town. Discreetly, he asked the two if they would consider returning to Roseburg. He could offer them a lot in town, the materials for a good house, and the help of his boys. Bethenia and Legrand were delighted at the proposal and began immediately to dispose of their property. The house and lot brought them about \$100, once the mortgage and interest were paid, and Thomas was pleased. "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," he said.²⁴

They set out together from Yreka on July 5. Legrand drove the team with Bethenia sitting up front beside him holding George in her lap. In the back seat Sarah held Bethenia's baby sister and Thomas brought up the rear, leading Queen. The trip was marked by beautiful weather and lovely scenery as they journeyed through the Siskiyou Mountains into Oregon. At one narrow bridge crossing which spanned a deep gulch, Legrand briskly whipped the horses for the uphill climb as they cleared the bridge. The horses sprang forward, wheels coming into contact with a rock, and slowly they began to roll backward toward the bridge's edge.

Bethenia saw the danger and sprang from the wagon as Thomas commanded "whoa!" to the horses. He grasped the wagon spokes and applied his full weight while Bethenia seized a chunk of wood and placed it behind the wheel, thus averting a tragedy. The only damage done was a severe sprain which Bethenia suffered on her right foot. Sarah wrapped the injured foot in a thick cloth and bathed it in the cold water from the creek, and they resumed the journey with Thomas at the reins.²⁵ It appeared that all of Legrand's efforts went awry.

When they arrived home, Thomas told Bethenia to select her acre of land and a building spot, gave Legrand the team so that he could haul lumber, and advised him to begin the house immediately. While hauling lumber Legrand struck up a conversation with a man who was looking for a partner to go into the brickmaking business. The man had a team and a site for the brickworks about a mile from Thomas. Thomas tried to dissuade Legrand, but he invested the little money they had left in the business and agreed to an equal partnership. Bethenia was to do the cooking for the hired men in exchange for use of the team. It was late in the season, the soil proposed for the brickworks was untested, and no preparations had been made to ready a site. Bethenia and George moved into a tent near the site of the brickworks, a low damp valley near the river. When the first few hundred bricks were molded, winter rains began, and all of the work dissolved into a mass of mud. In addition to this ill fortune, Bethenia was stricken with typhoid fever and had to be moved back to the Owens home. While she recuperated Thomas again urged his son-in-law to begin building the house, but Legrand insisted that Thomas deed the land to him. Thomas, patient and generous as he was,

explained to Legrand that he and Sarah had decided to deed the property to Bethenia and George. He watched Legrand and Bethenia as their "good starts" developed into failures, and now all they had left was one saddle horse. He felt it best to secure the home in the name of his daughter and grandchild.²⁶

Legrand, enraged at the insult, refused the building site. He bought two lots from Aaron and Sarah Rose for \$150 on Oak Street between Main and Jackson and hauled the timber off Bethenia's lot to the new homesite where he began building the house.²⁷ Thomas said nothing more and allowed Legrand to order shingles and nails from the store on his account. As winter descended Bethenia moved into the partially finished house. Her health continued to falter, she had been ailing since the birth of George, and the bout with typhoid had weakened her. George was also ill and fretful much of the time. The situation deteriorated day by day. When she was unable to bear the pain of her home situation any longer Bethenia sought her parents' counsel. Sarah was indignant: "any man that could not make a living with the help he has had, never will make one; and with his temper, he is liable to kill you at any time."²⁸ Thomas advised Bethenia to be patient, to go back and reconcile her differences with Legrand. "After that," he promised, "if you cannot possibly get along, come home." Greatly relieved, Bethenia took the baby and returned home, assured now that her parents would protect her if necessary. The efforts at peacemaking between the couple were fruitless. The care and discipline of the baby became the breaking point. Legrand thought the one and one-half year old child was old enough to be trained and take reprimands, and he would "spank him unmercifully" when

George cried. Betherenia could not bear to see the child punished so severely, and her interference sparked the quarrels. Perhaps Betherenia felt her knowledge of child-rearing superior to Legrand's, since she had practically reared her six younger brothers and sisters. As father of the child Legrand probably felt it was his prerogative to set the standards in their home. Betherenia felt Legrand's excesses also ran to overindulgence. At one meal he fed George six hard-cooked eggs while Betherenia protested that the overfeeding would sicken the child, and the battle raged on. One winter morning in February, Legrand and Betherenia engaged in a final bitter argument.²⁹ Legrand "threw the baby on the bed" and rushed out. Betherenia put on her hat and shawl, gathered a few "necessaries" for the baby and fled down Oak Street toward the safety of her family. The three-quarter mile sprint left her breathless. When she arrived at the foot of Oak Street she waved to Flem who was ferrying a man across the river.³⁰ Flem could see that Betherenia was distraught so he took the baby under one arm and said to Betherenia, "shall I take you under my other arm? It seems to me you're getting smaller every year." The gentle touch was typical of Flem, always ready to "smooth out the wrinkles." "Hang on to me," he comforted her, "Mother will have breakfast ready, and I guess a good square meal is what you need." Unfortunately, Betherenia's dilemma went much deeper than the need for a square meal which, as everyone knew, had been provided many times over to the floundering couple. On the following day, Thomas and his daughter went to her home to get her things. Betherenia agreed to sign over her share of the unfinished house and lot which still had money owing on them. But before Legrand could find a purchaser he thought the

situation over and urged Betheria to return home. Her patience, stretched to the limit, Betheria reminded her husband that she had once told him that if they ever separated she would never return. And she never did.³¹

Notes

¹The remarks are attributed to Thomas J. Dryer, an editor of the Portland Oregonian who visited the Umpqua Valley in 1853. See William G. Robbins, "The Far Western Frontier: Economic Opportunity and Social Democracy in Early Roseburg, Oregon" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oregon, 1969), hereafter cited as Robbins, Far Western Frontier.

²Ibid., pp. 20-22.

³The Owens claim was not recorded until June 22, 1866, according to Record of Deeds, at the Douglas County Courthouse, Roseburg, Oregon. An abstract of the land prepared by Douglas County Abstract Company of Roseburg identifies the land in Township 26, Section 25. The delay in filing the claim was a fairly common occurrence in the early settlement era according to the Douglas County clerk.

⁴Robbins, Far Western Frontier, p. 31.

⁵According to E. M. Moore's Life and Conversations of E. M. Moore (Roseburg: Douglas County Historical Society, 1922), the Owens Ferry established in 1853 at the foot of Oak Street. Today, the crossing is referred to as the Oak Street bridge and it links Roseburg with Highway I-5.

⁶Owens-Adair, Life, p. 24.

⁷Bowen, The Willamette Valley, p. 185.

⁸Bancroft, History of Oregon, p. 437, stated that early marriage is the rule of all new communities "for obvious reasons." "In Oregon, especially, where women were few, a girl was sure to have suitors before she had fairly reached maturity."

⁹The writer has formed this composite of Bethenia Owens-Adair based on portraits of her on file at The Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon, and from photographs in her books, in biographical sketches contained in several "mugbooks," and from family photographs, and from those found in newspaper articles, and also from a careful reading and interpretation of her autobiographical writings and journal entries (see Figure 1).

¹⁰The Pease story, as described in Owens-Adair, Life, p. 217, is open to interpretation in terms of deciding if Legrand Hill came across the Plains with the Peases or merely from the Lewis and Clark River and thence "across the plains" meaning the Clatsop Plains. The writer's sense is that Hill emigrated from Virginia to Missouri and then on to Oregon in 1849. In either case, the story confirms that Hill was in Clatsop County by 1849 and employed in mill work previous to his job with Thomas Owens.

¹¹See Probate Court records, divorce suit of Betheria and Legrand Hill, Douglas County Courthouse archives in Roseburg. Testimony in the Hill divorce suit by L. C. London establishes the precise location of the Hill farm in Jackson County. London said that the Hill family was in "good circumstances" and their "standing in society is good" in 1858.)

¹²Clarke, Oregon, p. 477.

¹³The Marriage Record, Volume 1, Douglas County Courthouse archives at Roseburg, has record of the Owens-Hill marriage. An extensive search of the marriage record book failed to determine the Rev. Stephens' denomination. However, the Matthews Memorabilia located at the Douglas County Museum in Roseburg contains the Rev. Stephens' funeral notice. He died July 18, 1886, and rites were conducted through the Presbyterian Church.)

¹⁴Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 17-28.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 27-28.

¹⁶Clarke, Oregon, pp. 478-79.

¹⁷Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 29-30.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 29-30.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 32-33.

²⁰Clarke, Oregon, p. 480.

²¹The Indian trouble which Betheria refers to is explained by Winther in The Great Northwest, pp. 173-74. He suggests that the Rogue River Indian War of 1850-55 was aggravated by heavy overland traffic caused by the California Gold Rush.

²²In an interview with Dr. James Ewell, Dec. 1, 1982, a Eugene psychologist, he states that it is a well-known fact that the birth of a child often precipitates problems in a marriage, especially if some of the problems have been lying dormant. Parental immaturity often leads to child and wife abuse. There is abundant evidence, Dr. Ewell says, to show that this amount of abuse increases as stresses mount. There is also evidence that economic pressures are a principal factor in cases of family abuse, and there also are more divorces and separations during these periods of stress.

²³Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 45-46.

²⁴Ibid., p. 46.

²⁵Ibid., p. 48.

²⁶Ibid., p. 49.

²⁷Refer to the Deed Index, County Recorder, Douglas County, Oregon, Roseburg. The two lots were bought on August 13 and 17 for \$75 apiece. The lots measured 80x100 feet.

²⁸Owens-Adair, Life, p. 50.

²⁹At the Douglas County Courthouse archives in Roseburg, see Action for Divorce in the Probate Records. Bethenia testified in this document that on February 23, 1858, she was "beaten and driven" from the house by Hill and told never to return. Her autobiography, p. 50, says that she left in March. The years may have dimmed her recollection of the unhappy event.

³⁰See the reminiscences of E. M. Moore, "Life and Conversations of E. M. Moore" in manuscript at the Douglas County Historical Society in Roseburg. Mr. Moore states that the South Umpqua ferry was established in 1853 by Thomas Owens and his sons Josiah & Flem. The ferry continued under their ownership until 1860 when Owens leased it to Alonzo Brown. See also, George Abdill, "Shine on Harvest Moon!" Umpqua Trapper, Douglas County Historical Society, p. 50, Fall 1972, for a note that the ferry under Brown's ownership was washed away in the great flood of 1861. According to Probate records in the Douglas County Courthouse, the matter came under arbitration on Jan. 23, 1862, when Owens sought recovery of \$150 for the ferryboat which he claimed was lost due to Brown's carelessness. The lease was canceled Mar. 14, 1862. Records are incomplete and it is not known whether Owens recovered the price of his ferryboat.

³¹Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 45-51.

CHAPTER IV

STRANDED BUT NOT CONQUERED: 1859-1866

There had never been a divorce in the Owens family. Tom Owens, the tough ex-sheriff who had stood off Indians and faced countless physical dangers in his years of frontiering was moved to tears by his daughter's decision to leave her husband. The lanky Kentuckian entreated Betherenia to consider her path carefully before making her decision. But two years of increasingly harsh treatment and angry tantrums directed at her had changed Betherenia from a hope-filled, carefree child to a disillusioned young woman. Betherenia suffered many moments of doubt--it was her "darkest hour." In planning her future, she had sought to replicate her parents' life. They were models of pioneer courage and resourcefulness, the kind of people who reaped abundant rewards from the sheer strength of their industrious nature. Though they had sought new opportunity several times, their moves had netted substantial gain in each instance. Their ties to the land, involvement in the progress of the community, and concern for their family had gained them the respect of their neighbors. If success was measured in wealth alone, Tom Owens easily fit the community's standard. He had arrived in the Oregon Country in 1843 with less than a dollar hard cash in his pocket--in a county that probably had less than one hundred dollars within its boundaries--and in less than ten years he was worth over twenty thousand.¹

Betherenia's ambitions had not been unrealistic, but her aspirations

for Legrand Hill were. She had sought happiness and success along the only path open to a respectable woman on the frontier--through marriage and motherhood--and she had devoted herself to it with a naive enthusiasm that only a young, impressionable girl could have mustered. Thus the collapse of her marriage was the bitterest of defeats--an admission that her energy and good intentions were incapable either of inspiring Legrand to achieve success or of shaping him into the man she wished him to become. Instead of a gradual path toward success, Legrand's legacy was lost opportunities, unfinished houses, and unrealized dreams.

Bethenia revealed little of her anguished feelings or despair at the crushing defeat she had suffered. Instead she critically evaluated her lowered social status, and resolved to meet her fate bravely and do her very best. She was fully aware that as a divorced woman she would, for all practical purposes, find herself once again in the position of being her father's child. Symbolically she would be sealed to her father, socially stigmatized, and financially dependent on him unless she could figure another way out.

As she considered her future course and the losses she would suffer without the social sanction of wifehood, she could not have helped but be struck by the dearth of opportunities for her sex. In frontier communities such as Roseburg one of the few respectable occupations a woman like Bethenia could attempt was some kind of domestic work.² The 1860 census reveals that of all other occupations only two percent of the employable population was engaged in domestic work.³

As Bethenia's health and spirits were gradually healed by the nurturing atmosphere in the large Owens household she resolved to fit

herself out as best she could for her duties of "a mother, and for the life yet before" her.⁴

On March 2, a tense confrontation between Betherenia and her husband took place in the offices of attorney Addison C. Gibbs⁵ in order to divide their property. The settlement included several head of livestock, and the division of the Oak Street property. Tom Owens, who had more than a passing interest in the transactions, appeared along with his daughter.

In her haste to disassociate herself from Legrand, Betherenia had wanted only her personal effects from the house. She had agreed to sign the deed to the house and lots over to Legrand since he had many unpaid bills to settle. He had attempted to find a purchaser immediately after they separated, but discovered he could not sell the land without clear title, or his wife's signature. It appears that a mortgage impeded the sale of the lots and in all probability the holder was Tom Owens. Gibbs later said that Hill wanted to sell the lots so that he could pay a note signed by Tom Owens which was secured by a mortgage. Thus it appears that in order to buy the lots from Aaron Rose, Legrand had been forced to borrow the cash from his father-in-law.⁶

Before Betherenia would agree to sign off her interest in the lots, she demanded possession of the livestock which the couple held jointly. Perhaps she sought restoration, in her father's interest, of the animals which he had generously provided as wedding gifts and presents during the four-year marriage. The following day Betherenia assigned the livestock to her father. In a wavering hand which bears witness to her woeful lack of education and is perhaps indicative of the emotional

impact of the day's business she wrote: "I assine the writhin bilasile to Thomas Owens for value received this third day of March 1858. Beatheany Hill."⁷

When the deeds were signed, Legrand handed Betherenia a package which appeared to be a bundle of clothing, and left. She removed the wrapping and discovered a dress and a veil. The dress was damp. As she held it up for examination, Betherenia's expression changed from curiosity to shock. The blue-flowered material had ugly stains on it and in some places it had rotted away as if some "strong acid" had been flung on it. Speechless, Gibbs went after Legrand who had retreated to the street. The attorney asked Legrand if he knew anything about the ruined garment but Legrand hotly denied any knowledge in the matter of the ruined dress, and his attitude reflected no regret.⁸

After the settlement with Legrand, Betherenia faced some hard facts about herself. She could barely read and her writing was practically illegible. She came to the decision that the only way she could advance herself and support George would be to seek an education. She had heard that the school in Roseburg was as good as any school in Oregon at the time, and she was eager to learn.⁹

Sarah had no objection to her daughter's aspirations. The presence of two more in the household presented no problems for Sarah. After years of hardship and loneliness on the frontier she now had the luxury of enjoying her family and her first grandchild, George. For Sarah, life was filled with all the "comforts and conveniences" anyone could desire "including excellent schools" for the children. She assured her daughter that George would be no trouble, although there were seven

Owens children in the household and Sarah, 35, was pregnant for the eleventh time.¹⁰

Nevertheless, Bethenia was concerned about the added burden and she was up early each day, out in the barn, milking and doing as much work as possible to help her parents, and on Saturdays she and the children did the family's washing and ironing.¹¹

For four months Bethenia attended "the Academy," a school house built in 1857 on an acre of land between Douglas and Washington Streets donated by Aaron Rose. The tiny farming community's citizens felt that their school building was located on one of the prettiest spots in the entire valley. Set amidst a picturesque grove of old oaks, the rough-hewn school was built with the contributions of the townspeople. It was a large building approximately "100 feet long, sixty or seventy feet wide and three stories high" set in the center of the grove. The community had planned its schoolhouse with many purposes in mind, thus the second floor contained not only the large classroom in which all the pupils met, but a second large room intended for public meetings and entertainments. The classroom where Bethenia attended had a teacher's desk upon a platform, one large blackboard and rough-hewn desks and seats, and recitation benches. School convened around nine o'clock and continued until four in the afternoon. It was customary for the pupils to come and go depending on the distance they lived from the school and the amount of time their farm chores required. As always in the early days, the children's first responsibility was at home. The students all had school books of a "very superior kind" even though there was no library, and the subjects which were "taught thoroughly" included

arithmetic, grammar, history, geography, reading, writing, and spelling. The more advanced students sometimes listened to the lessons of the lower grades.¹²

Bethenia was a conscientious student and by the end of the four-month term she had progressed through the third reader and was picking up her other subjects with ease.¹³

In the fall, Diana and John Hobson came for a visit and soon her older sister had convinced Bethenia that a change of scene would benefit her. And perhaps Bethenia and her family felt that a visit to Clatsop County would serve to cool the scandal that was spreading through the small community of Roseburg. When Bethenia returned to Roseburg the following January she applied for a divorce from Legrand Hill at her father's urging.¹⁴

In the divorce complaint Bethenia stated that she has resided with her husband until "driven from the house" and told not to return. She described how she had sought her father's protection fearing that "great bodily harm and injury" would come to herself and George. She charged that Legrand had subjected her to the "most humiliating and cruel treatment" which she believed inconsistent and in violation of the duty he owed her as "wife and mother." Since their separation in February of 1858 Bethenia stated that Legrand had made her miserable by "falsely and maliciously" implying that her conduct was "unbecoming a wife and mother." She said this monstrous accusation which Legrand had made was "false, slanderous and unfounded." Furthermore, she testified, Legrand had abandoned her and the baby with no support after he had disposed of the house and property in Roseburg. Bethenia asked the court, through

her attorney Stephen F. Chadwick, to restore her maiden name, give her custody of George, then two years and nine months old, and to provide support for herself and her son.¹⁵

Legrand's efforts to ruin Betherenia's reputation probably were grounded in his desire to regain custody of his son by proving the mother unfit. His widowed mother, who resided alone near Ashland, had hopes that her son would settle down and bring her grandchild to live with her, and thus she urged Legrand to challenge the suit.

The hotly contested divorce trial opened in Roseburg in the summer. Betherenia arrived home from Astoria with Flem in time to confer with her attorney, Chadwick, who had been hired by Tom Owens. Legrand was represented by B. F. Dowell, a Jacksonville attorney who had made a name for himself handling white claims during the recent Indian wars.

Under oath Legrand admitted he had sold the couple's home and abandoned Betherenia and George, but he denied all of her charges of maltreatment. In hopes of regaining his son he stubbornly maintained he had never accused his wife of anything "but what he believed to be true."¹⁶

Many local residents were sworn by the court to testify in behalf of the plaintiff and defendant, but in the end the bonds that had existed between Betherenia and Legrand were officially dissolved. On October 18, 1859, the Honorable P. P. Prim, judge of the Third Judicial District for the Territory of Oregon, restored her maiden name of Owens to Betherenia, placed George in her custody and awarded her property and the costs of the action.

"I felt like a free woman,"¹⁷ Betherenia later wrote and for a time Legrand disappeared from her life taking some of the anxiety, unhappiness, and tension of the past several years with him. As always, Legrand could walk away from his mistakes, but Betherenia, whose heritage and sex inexorably determined her course, resolved to renew her efforts to support herself and George.

Betherenia now sought work "in all directions" although her father wondered why she just couldn't be content and stay at home.¹⁸ "I am able to support you and your child" he told her but no amount of arguing could shake her determination to provide for herself and her child. She was well aware she had a sharply defined position in society and that her options were limited. Washing was considered a most profitable occupation, but Tom Owens was embarrassed at the thought of his daughter doing such menial work so he bought her a sewing machine so she could work at home. For about a year Betherenia found ample work in two respectable occupations: sewing and nursing.¹⁹

Since early childhood Betherenia had loved nursing. Sarah said she was a "born doctor" who, as a child, had loved to play with rag dolls, feeding them medicine with a spoon.²⁰ And of course, there was no end to the nursing opportunities afforded by the large Owens family, where it seemed a baby came along every two years.²¹ Seldom was Betherenia seen without a child nestling in her arms or clinging to her skirts, so it was natural, that she would take so easily to the nurturing and care required of a good nurse.

On the frontier, women were trained by experience, and it was not uncommon for women to see all of the medical emergencies of their

families including stitching up wounds and setting broken bones. Women, especially were called upon to assist one another in childbirth and every "willing, capable woman received her training as a nurse from actual experience in her neighbors' homes, as well as in her own."²²

On one occasion Bethenia was hired by a farmer who lived about two miles from Roseburg to nurse his wife during confinement. The baby was born the day after Bethenia's arrival and for three weeks Bethenia cared for her patient attending to her needs day and night. In addition to nursing, Bethenia was expected to take charge of the entire household, filling in for the recovering wife. Bethenia did the housework and cooking for the family which consisted of husband, wife and three children, herself and George, and four hired men. So that the mother could rest at night Bethenia kept the infant in her own bed, arose at four in the morning to begin the milking, and did all the cooking, washing, and ironing. When her patient had recovered and Bethenia was prepared to depart, the farmer inquired about her fee. "Five dollars a week," she replied timidly knowing that this was more than a woman's worth was considered in those days, but feeling that she had fully earned it. The farmer replied that he had not expected to pay over three dollars a week but that if she was willing to take her wage in trade at a store in town he would pay her what she asked.²³

Bethenia knew that the hired men were paid two dollars a day and rested on Sundays, but she lacked the "courage to assert her rights" and was forced to accept inferior goods in pay for her hard work. This experience, and similar ones, served to shape her thinking into

"independent channels of thought regarding the status of women, and her rights to equal compensation with man for equal work."²⁴

Bethenia remained relatively content with her role in the Owens household but decided in 1860 to return to the farm on the Clatsop Plains with John and Diana where her help was greatly needed. Diana was the mistress of a large farm and the mother of a growing family. John, her husband, a pioneer of 1843 in the same train as the Owens had traveled in, was a well-known farmer and businessman. Bethenia admired her brother-in-law for his intelligence and generosity. He was a self-made man with little formal education but a wealth of knowledge and a gift for language which served him well in dealing with the Indians of the region.²⁵

In the fall of 1860 Diana and Bethenia traveled to Oysterville, Washington, across the Columbia from Astoria, on a visit to a girlhood friend, Sarah Kimball Munson. The few days that had been arranged for the visit passed swiftly so Sarah convinced Diana that she and her husband, Captain Munson, would see that Bethenia was returned safely home when they had "gotten their visit out." As the old friends confided their secrets to one another Bethenia revealed her "great anxiety" for an education. Sarah urged Bethenia to remain at Oysterville and attend school there and Bethenia agreed on the condition that she find some way of earning money for necessary expenses. It was arranged that Bethenia take in washing in order to pay room and board. "Thus I passed one of the most pleasant and profitable winters of my life," Bethenia said later.²⁶

In the spring Betherenia returned to Clatsop Plains and told Diana she was determined to get at least a good common education. "I do not wish to make my living over the washtub nor at any other form of drudgery," she declared. She was tired of living with relatives and friends for room and board, and clothes. She had become convinced that only with an education could she become truly independent.

Diana and John discussed the matter with Betherenia and they agreed that if she would stay and help Diana for the busy summer months on the farm they would pay her expenses for six months' schooling in Astoria during the winter. Before long, Betherenia proposed to earn some extra money by holding a summer school on the Clatsop Plains. By rising at four to help with the milking and chores, and by washing in the evenings and Saturdays, she had enough spare time to make plans for a summer school. John Hobson suggested she try out the idea on the neighbors and within a few days she had made arrangements for sixteen pupils at two dollars each for the three-month school. This first school was taught in the old Presbyterian church on the Clatsop Plains, the first one erected in Oregon. It was the same building which her father and John Hobson had helped to build in 1857.²⁷ Though some of her pupils were more advanced than she was, what she lacked in competency she quickly gained by rapid comprehension. Each evening she hurried home to master the next day's lesson with the help of her brother-in-law.²⁸

When school began in the fall in Astoria, Betherenia, George, and her nephew Frank found rooms in the old Boelling Hotel near the waterfront. Betherenia's zest for education soon turned to humiliation when she found herself placed in the primary class in arithmetic where she was required

to recite with children eight and ten years old. With her great determination and her teacher's assistance she advanced quickly through all of her subjects into the advanced classes. By four each morning she was poring over the day's lessons, for she had determined that nothing would be permitted to come between her and "the greatest opportunity" of her life.²⁹

That summer Bethenia was back on the farm, as agreed, helping John and Diana. It was 1862 and the state of Oregon was calling upon its counties to contribute to the Sanitary Commission which had been organized to aid and comfort the soldiers in the field during the Civil War. Bethenia volunteered to help Hobson's hired man make a mammoth cheese as the Clatsop District's contribution. The area's dairy farmers contributed the milk and when the cheese was cured it was pronounced such a success that it was sold and resold again in Astoria bringing in one hundred and forty-five dollars. Bethenia went to the State fair at Salem where the cheese was "auctioned off many times till it brought between four hundred and five hundred dollars." The money and cheese were forwarded later to the Oregon soldiers.³⁰ Whether the cheese ever reached the "boys in blue" and news as to whether or not they found it palatable never reached Oregon.

In addition to patriotic endeavors for the Sanitary Commission, Bethenia enjoyed the attentions of "Brass Button" society at regular entertainment staged by the officers at Fort Canby, fifteen miles from Astoria.³¹

The fall of 1863 found Bethenia settled in three rented rooms in what was then known as the Old Gray House in Astoria overlooking the

Columbia River. She attended school and met her daily expenses by picking blackberries, taking odd jobs of needlework, and by washing and ironing. George, now seven, helped by bringing driftwood up from the beach for their kitchen fire.

By her second term in the Astoria school Betherenia had impressed the school board enough to obtain a temporary appointment at twenty-five dollars per month as an assistant at the school to fill in for an ailing teacher. She did this in addition to her own household work and the outside work she had contracted for in order to pay her expenses, and with "the greatest economy" and hard work she managed to save a little money.³²

One spring evening as she ironed on the kitchen table with a book propped before her, Betherenia received a call from a friend of John and Diana Hobson. Captain A. C. Farnsworth,³³ a middle-aged sea captain, had learned of Betherenia's struggles through the Hobsons and admiring her perseverance had come forward to offer his help. Captain Farnsworth told Betherenia that he was alone in the world and having more money than he needed, wished to help her. He explained he did not wish to "compromise" her and that he would impose no obligations. He offered to furnish all the money for her expenses, and George's, to any school of her choosing in the United States, for as long a time as she chose. As her benefactor, he said he expected nothing, promised never even to write to her, and never to divulge the source of her good fortune.³⁴

Betherenia considered the offer quickly but her "self-will, independence, and inexperience" caused her to reject the offer. She had vowed to rely on her own resources rather than incur an obligation even to so

good a family friend. "I could not consent to such an obligation," she said. Undoubtedly acceptance of the offer would have changed her life and in later years she "bitterly repented" her hasty decision feeling that it was a great mistake. Acceptance could have opened the "doors of science" earlier and saved long years of "bitter experience" and "irretrievably lost opportunities."³⁵

Bethenia's reputation as a competent and dependable teacher kept her continuously employed in the country schools around Astoria for the next two years. Midway through her school term in 1863 Bethenia was selected by the school board to fill a position at Bruceport. She received a special certificate from Judge Cyrus Olney, county school superintendent, after taking the examination for certification.³⁶

In the spring of 1864 Bethenia was back on the Clatsop Plains having accepted a four-month school term at forty dollars a month. She and George moved into the abandoned parsonage at Skipanon which was given to them free and with the help of neighbors made the old house habitable for the spring and summer months. She had boarded with so many families over the past two years that she had an overwhelming desire for her own home. With four hundred dollars she had saved from her wages as a school teacher she bought a half lot in Astoria and contracted with a carpenter to build a three-roomed cottage, with a small porch. At the end of the term Bethenia and George moved into their new home--the first she had ever owned, and doubly prized because she had earned it entirely by herself.

Bethenia was proud of her new home and her position in Clatsop County society. In spite of earlier fears of being excluded because of

her divorce, Betheria had proved herself respectable and had earned the admiration of the community. She retired from teaching and the transient life and earned her living working at her sewing machine and doing needlework. Work seemed to come from all directions and with her financial worries diminished it seemed that nothing could alter her hard-won independence and happiness.

Over the years since their divorce, Legrand Hill had written from time to time urging Betheria to remarry him. His letters ignored, Hill decided to pay a visit to his former wife, appearing unexpectedly one winter evening at her new home. Perhaps Hill felt that his sudden appearance might overcome Betheria's opposition but Betheria had no desire to return to a life of dependence and uncertainty. "He found not the young, ignorant, inexperienced wife whom he had neglected and misused, but a full-grown, self-reliant, self-supporting woman, who could look upon him only with pity," Betheria said.³⁷

No amount of coaxing could change Betheria's mind. She refused to allow Legrand into her home, fearing that he might make good on his threat to run off with George. If Legrand Hill had entertained the notion that his former wife might have been grateful for an offer of marriage and his protection, he had greatly misjudged her character.

Divorced and the responsibility for her son had left Betheria stranded temporarily, but not conquered. She had a loyal family, an optimistic faith in her own powers, and gradually the understanding that she was the mistress of her own future. Although bound by prevailing ideas regarding appropriate female behavior, she learned to think freely and act positively toward her independence. In a matter of a few years

she had matured considerably and those who had known the semi-literate fourteen-year-old bride of Legrand Hill would not have recognized the self-confident young matron of nineteen.

Notes

¹See Owens-Adair, Life, p. 27, for this remark made by John Hobson about his father-in-law around 1855.

²The United States Census for 1860, Manuscript Census Return for Douglas County, Oregon, Deer Creek precinct (Microfilm in Special Collections, University of Oregon Library, Eugene, Oregon) hereafter cited as M.C.R. Douglas County, presents an official survey of the residents of Deer Creek Precinct which appears to support this writer's notion that women overwhelmingly were engaged in the occupation of wife and mother. Invariably, women listed their occupations as some variation of "wife" and/or "keeping house."

³In the year 1860, Robbins, Far Western Frontier, p. 152, notes that the employed population of Roseburg consisted of 46% in farming, five percent as professionals, eight percent in business, eighteen percent as artisans, five percent in general laboring, two percent domestics, one percent not gainfully employed, and fifteen percent reporting no occupation.

⁴Owens-Adair, Life, p. 52.

⁵A biographical sketch of Addison C. Gibbs is found in Howard M. Corning, ed., Dictionary of Oregon History (Portland, Oregon: Binford & Mort, Publishers, 1956). Addison Crandall Gibbs, 1826-1886, was educated in New York state and admitted to the bar there in 1849. He was territorial representative from Umpqua, 1852-3, and served as collector of customs in the Umpqua River area until 1857. He was governor of Oregon from 1862-66.

⁶See the Douglas County, Oregon, Probate Records, Divorce, Hill vs. Hill, Deposition of Addison C. Gibbs, October 8, 1859. The testimony of Addison C. Gibbs brings out several important points relating to the settlement of the Hill property. Betheria's right of dower prevented Hill from selling the Oak Street property since without her signature he did not have clear title. Secondly he could not sell the lots because they were mortgaged to Thomas Owens, who was "joint maker" of the note. This is inferred from Gibbs' testimony in which he testified that Hill "wished to sell the lots to pay a note signed by Thomas Owens," and "secured by a mortgage" on the lots.

⁷Refer to Exhibit A in Divorce, Hill vs. Hill in the Probate Records, Douglas County, Roseburg, Oregon. This document is a bill of sale in which Legrand Hill sold Betheria an eight year-old-bay mare, a two-year-old sorrel, a cow, a heifer, and a steer. The following day March 3, 1858, Betheria signed over the property to her father. The language and spelling are presented exactly as Betheria scrawled them, including the mispelling, or phonetic representation, of her first name.

⁸Refer to the document entitled "Deposition of Addison C. Gibbs," October 8, 1859, Douglas County, Roseburg. Gibbs says in his testimony that Hill put the bundle of clothing down and hurried away before Bethernia opened it. He describes the dress as "blue-flowered" and "very valuable" and a dark-figured mantilla, probably a veil. He says that under examination the damp material gave way, appearing to be marred by yellowish stains, and torn by what appeared to have been the application of a "strong acid." In all probability Legrand's final temper tantrum took the form of the ultimate childish insult--that of spoiling his wife's wedding garments--probably by urinating on them.)

⁹Evans, History of the Pacific Northwest, p. 502.

¹⁰See M.C.R. 1860, Douglas County Deer Creek District. Luracy, the Owen's last child, was born in 1859.

¹¹Joseph Gaston, The Centennial History of Oregon, 1811-1912 (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1912), p. 589, hereafter cited as Gaston, Centennial History.

¹²Eli S. Hall, Then to Now with Roseburg Schools: 1854-1970 (Portland, Oregon: Metropolitan Press, 1970), p. 30. Hall notes that there were forty pupils in District No. 4 at about the time Bethernia Owens joined the class.

¹³Evans, History of the Pacific Northwest, p. 502.

¹⁴Gaston, Centennial History, p. 589.

¹⁵See the Douglas County Probate Records, Action for Divorce, January 27, 1859. Testimony and quotations are derived from the divorce documents and hereafter referred to as divorce suit.

¹⁶Divorce suit, October 3, 1859.

¹⁷Owens-Adair, Life, p. 56.

¹⁸Gaston, Centennial History, p. 589.

¹⁹S. J. Clarke, Oregon, p. 483.

²⁰Gaston, Centennial History, p. 592.

²¹Clarke, Oregon, p. 469.

²²Owens-Adair, Life, p. 305.

²³Ibid., p. 306.

²⁴Ibid., p. 307.

²⁵Bethenia describes John Hobson's character in Owens-Adair, Life, p. 252. See also Marjorie Halderman, "The Hobson Family: Oregon Pioneers of 1843," unpublished, December 1969, pp. 1-10.

²⁶Gaston, Centennial History, p. 589.

²⁷Owens-Adair, Life, p. 59.

²⁸Ibid., p. 59.

²⁹Gaston, Centennial History, p. 590.

³⁰This incident appears in several versions of Bethenia's story including the version in Gaston, Centennial History, p. 590. The author searched in vain through old newspapers for an account of the huge cheese from Clatsop to no avail. The Oregon Statesman, Oct. 6, 1862, p. 2, carries a report of fair activities but no mention of the cheese.

³¹Owens-Adair, Life, p. 257.

³²Evans, History of the Pacific Northwest, p. 503.

³³Captain A. C. Farnsworth was a well-known Columbia bar pilot. His obituary appeared in the Astoria Weekly Astorian 13 January 1874. He was in his 50s when he made the offer to Bethenia.

³⁴Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 63-64.

³⁵Ibid., p. 64.

³⁶A copy of the certificate issued by Mr. Olney is found in Journal 3.

³⁷Owens-Adair, Life, p. 69.

CHAPTER V

RESPECTABILITY, REFORM, AND THE HEALING ARTS:

1867-1873

In 1860, the devastating experience of divorce drove Bethenia Owens from Roseburg. In the beginning she had been totally dependent on her family for economic survival. She had promised herself that she would restore her good name and regain her place in society while she learned to support herself and her son George. She put aside all other concerns and disciplined herself to acquire the education which she felt certain would provide her eventually with the means to earn a respectable living. Time healed her embarrassment, and an ingenious bent for thrift moved her toward modest financial success.

This fortunate turn of events permitted Bethenia to consider returning to Roseburg. From time to time she had received letters from her family there, and had visited often. Occasionally Hyman Abraham, Jane's husband, sent news of Jane and their children and chatty items about mutual friends. "Milton stayed here last night," he remarked, "and every other word that he spoke was of his Frd. Betheny [sic]." Hyman hinted rather broadly to his single sister-in-law, that she might consider "Milton" as a "first choice" owing to his kindness to children.¹

It was probably Abraham, a prospering dry goods merchant, who was responsible for encouraging Bethenia to return to Roseburg.² He had

generously made room in his business for his brother, Solomon, who was emigrating from Poland, he told Bethenia.³ He agreed to help her start a millinery business, providing her with merchandise and advice. The backing of Abraham, "a young merchant...highly esteemed by all"⁴ represented a fairly secure way in which to begin a new venture, and in due time Bethenia was convinced to seize this attractive opportunity. In the fall of 1867 Bethenia rented her little home in Astoria and moved to Roseburg. She would use skills as a milliner and dressmaker in her new enterprise, because shopkeeping was a respectable occupation and a step forward financially and socially.

Bethenia's millinery store was welcomed by Roseburg women, and she had more than two years of uninterrupted success until a competitor appeared. The new milliner, Mrs. Ann Compton, immediately sought to undermine Bethenia's confidence and success. "She came right in and looked me over, stock and all. She said she had been a milliner for years, had learned the trade and understood it thoroughly, and had come to stay."⁵

The stylish merchandise and professional service offered by Mrs. Compton, who located her shop right next door, threatened to drive Bethenia out of business. Further, she had humiliated Bethenia by calling her an amateur and had captured the market with her fashionable goods. Bethenia decided to take a gamble. She borrowed \$250 to travel to San Francisco to learn the trade from "the best milliner in that city," a Mrs. Fouts.⁶

The battle of the milliners continued as the two tried every trick to entice buyers to their shops. Mrs. Compton was an expert; an

aggressive businesswoman who lost no time finding new trade. She sent her husband around the countryside gathering in old hats to repair. Betherenia felt her rival had won until she discovered Mrs. Compton's technique. From her windows Betherenia had a clear view of Mrs. Compton's work area. She "learned the art of cleaning, stiffening, fitting, bleaching and pressing hats" and within a year her sales amounted to \$1,500 and her business was making a profit.⁷

Proof of the rivalry between Betherenia and Mrs. Compton may be seen in the advertising columns and the social announcements of the Roseburg Pantagraph. On one occasion the newspaper reported that Mrs. Compton was "travelling to Portland for new stock and will sell cheap for cash."⁸ A week later Betherenia had a new calling card made up and the Pantagraph reported that "those who cannot be suited by her stock must be hard to please."⁹

Betherenia's advertisement assured her clients that she intended to keep on hand a "full and complete assortment of Millinery, Dress Trimmings and Fancy goods of the latest style." All of this was made possible by her attendance at the trend-setting San Francisco markets twice a year. In addition to outerwear such as cloaks, shawls, and a variety of hats she carried hosiery, nets, false hair, and assorted fabrics, trims, jewelry, and ornaments. She also offered her customers the services of a Mrs. J. Robertson, an experienced fabricator of the latest dress and cloak styles, in October of 1872. Mrs. Robertson was confident that after a practice of twenty-five years she had no fears of "pleasing the most fastidious." In addition to a new employee, Betherenia

announced she was adding variety items such as jewelry and toys to her "fancy goods."¹⁰

Mrs. Compton's advertising appears through December 31, 1872, disappearing thereafter. One must conclude that Betherenia's persistent acquisition of up-to-date styles and merchandise eventually drove her opponent away.

Betherenia's mastery of the millinery trade linked her socially with some of Roseburg's prominent merchants and professional people.¹¹ Roseburg's elite in the early 1870s were business and property owners, many of whom participated in literary, church, and social activities. Among the names appearing in the society news is W. F. "Flem" Owens (Betherenia's brother) who was a trustee of the Roseburg Public Library and a member of the Roseburg Library Association. Betherenia's name appears frequently in the news and social columns indicating she was a popular and active member of polite society. The Ladies Sewing Circle had accepted her, and it was reported that this group of young single women and matrons was getting to be "the feature of society of town." Within the same week a large company met "at the house of Miss B. A. Owens and enjoyed themselves to their heart's content,"¹² and in September Louis F. Langenberg wrote that his son Easton had been down to Miss Owens' in the afternoon to "have a little sing."¹³ These wholesome activities were in connection with Betherenia's new interest, temperance. It is possible that Betherenia waited to publicly pursue the cause of temperance until her parents left Roseburg, because someone within her family circle was afflicted with alcoholism. Although no evidence exists to suggest which family member that could have been, it can be

noted that Tom Owens' "health began to fail" in the late 1860s and in 1869 they moved to Shasta County, California where he died four years later.¹⁴

Citizen efforts to control liquor were not new in the Northwest. American and Russian fur traders had introduced it to the Indians as a bartering medium for pelts, and the arrival of settlers in the Oregon Territory had only increased the problem.¹⁵ Citizens were permitted to transport liquor into the territory, but distilleries were prohibited, and in 1847 Tom Owens led a posse of Clatsop Plains farmers against a man accused of keeping a distillery and selling alcohol to the Indians.¹⁶ Community disapproval against the growing problem found an outlet in groups like The International Order of Good Templars which was established in Washington Territory in 1865. Young men there had organized the IOGT to attack the liquor traffic as "one of the greatest menaces of mankind" and to favor the issue of woman suffrage.¹⁷ These ideals gained approval in Roseburg as well, and in November 1872 a number of its leading citizens formed IOGT Lodge No. 5, and Betherenia was one of its charter members.¹⁸ The same year she joined the Women's Christian Temperance Union and accepted the WCTU office of state superintendent of hygiene and heredity, an office she would retain for more than thirty years.¹⁹

Betherenia's first public utterance on the evils of alcohol appears in a letter she addressed to the editor of the Roseburg Pantagraph in which she asks him to take an editorial stand on the issue. She explained her opposition to alcohol as a personal cause--the result of tasting "the bitter fruits of intemperance."²⁰ In one lecture made to

the International Order of Good Templars Bethenia explained that early in her life her hopes had been "crushed by this common curse of humanity, alcohol." She said that it had robbed her home and childhood of "every vestige of beauty and sunshine," and had permitted her to "grow up in ignorance of the contents of even the primary school books."²¹ Unless these comments were purely platform rhetoric, it would seem that Bethenia's unhappy experiences at home were sufficient inspiration to motivate her to embrace this cause.

Once Bethenia questioned the rights of husbands and fathers to abuse their families through intemperate use of alcohol, it was logical that she embrace the cause of women's rights. Bethenia's own experience as an unschooled, unskilled woman with a dependent child made her painfully aware of the dilemma women faced when they lost their secure niche in society through divorce, abandonment, or death. She now became "converted to the ideas" Susan B. Anthony was advancing in her newspaper The Revolution.²² She found it easy to take up Miss Anthony's cry that women must "equip themselves to earn their own livelihood."²³ Bethenia understood how vital it was that women acquire schooling so that they could support themselves if they were obliged to escape the domestic trap. It is clear that Bethenia understood the significant benefits that women had as wives, but her four-year marriage and the aftermath had convinced her that she was not a suitable candidate for that state. Now that she had discovered her ability to survive in society without parental or spousal control or protection she felt certain that she could never again relinquish her freedom. She knew that she "was never born to be controlled by the light of any one's opinion simply because

that person happened to be a man," and furthermore it would make little difference if that person happened to be her husband.²⁴

Although her own opinion was firmly set, based on her own experience, Betheria knew that changing society's opinion would be another matter. She had already experienced some success as a public commentator on temperance matters, and, after having read Miss Anthony's influential arguments in The Revolution, she threw her support to Abigail Scott Duniway who had started publishing New Northwest (as an organ devoted to the support of women's suffrage) in Portland in 1871. She contributed articles and solicited subscriptions in the Roseburg vicinity, reporting to Mrs. Duniway on one occasion that she had successfully converted one of their readers to the cause of women's rights. She had agreed to accept a cord of wood in payment for a subscription and found that the new male subscriber not only agreed with the paper's viewpoint but was sharing it with his neighbors. "This week he surprised me by presenting a petition for a road, asking me,—a woman,—to sign it," she told Mrs. Duniway.²⁵ This enthusiasm for the cause made Betheria the logical person to act as Roseburg hostess to Miss Anthony when she came west in November 1871 on a lecture tour. On Mrs. Duniway's recommendation, Miss Anthony contacted Betheria to arrange for a lecture hall. Betheria was both startled and pleased when she received the following telegram from Miss Anthony one Friday morning: "Secure me a place to speak on Saturday evening."²⁶ Suspecting Roseburg's opposition, Betheria carefully selected the town's largest hall--a church, for its aura of respectability--and induced the minister to make it available for the lecture. She hurried to the printing office, ordered several

hundred posters announcing the event, and hired a boy to place them in conspicuous places all over town. The news spread rapidly, and later that evening she received a visit from the proprietor of one of Roseburg's largest saloons who told her that the saloon owners had joined forces to checkmate the feminists' efforts. "We are getting up a free supper and free dance at the hotel, and I'll bet you don't have a baker's dozen at the church," he boasted. In a town of 500 which had sixteen saloons, Betherenia feared his scheme might work.²⁷

Miss Anthony arrived Saturday morning on the southbound stage from Portland, alighting at the McClellan Hotel where a large crowd had gathered to observe the celebrated speaker. Betherenia escorted Mrs. Anthony to her home at the millinery shop, and the two passed several hours discussing women's issues until it was time to leave for the church. Nearing the saloons, Betherenia and Miss Anthony could hear the violins and animated stomping of the anti-Anthony dancers, but despite the effort to sabotage Miss Anthony's speech, the lecture hall was filled. Later, Mrs. Anthony told Mrs. Duniway that she never forgot the "little Roseburg milliner" who had successfully organized her southern Oregon visit.²⁸

Many who advocated women's rights, including Betherenia, saw temperance and prohibition as a single issue, bound directly to the cause of woman suffrage. Early in the 1870s Betherenia and Mrs. Duniway had shared this view. Both were delegates to a State Temperance Alliance conference in Salem in 1873 which sought to unite political forces to destroy the liquor traffic. Betherenia had planned a speech in which she would declare that the only way to defeat the liquor interests was to make the

matter a political issue and place it before the people in such a way that "all good moral people"--and that included women--could use the vote to legislate alcohol out of existence.²⁹ Betheria's speech was never delivered, although the Pantagraph printed it, because delegates quarreled over charges of political maneuvering, and the attempts at coalition failed.³⁰ Later Mrs. Duniway and Betheria might have disagreed over how to deal with these issues. It appears that in the 1870s Betheria's admiration for the suffragist leader motivated her to write a defense of Mrs. Duniway; or she may have prompted the editor of the Pantagraph to do so when a news article appeared in the Portland Oregon Herald denouncing Mrs. Duniway for abandoning the goal of prohibition. The Roseburg article refutes the charge that Mrs. Duniway pandered to liquor interests and reminds its readers that she had declared that women could vote whiskey out of existence.³¹ Mrs. Duniway struggled with this idea for some time and by 1883 had come to think that prohibition would never become an accomplished fact; but she still believed in the power of the woman's ballot which would demand "that no son or husband shall be drunken or unchaste." In time her political pragmatism would force her to repudiate the prohibitionists as a liability, and in 1890 she would split with temperance forces altogether, alienating many of her loyal workers in the cause of woman suffrage.³²

Temperance work, a successful millinery business, and guiding her son might have been sufficient to keep Betheria fully occupied but she began seriously to pursue a lifelong interest in nursing which would prove to be a significant turning point. A childhood spent nursing brothers and sisters and then requests from her neighbors and friends

had given her more than a casual knowledge of lay healing. On one occasion when she was called to help at a friend's she realized that her skills were superior to the doctor she was assisting. Betherenia offered to help one Dr. Palmer of Roseburg insert a catheter, and when she successfully inserted the instrument to bring "immediate relief" to her patient she decided that her special aptitude must be developed. Dr. Palmer neither appreciated nor approved of his nurse's interference, but the patient's response was sufficient to motivate Betherenia to seek further information. She confided her interest to Dr. Salathiel Hamilton who supported her interest, and with his help she began to study medical books, like Gray's Anatomy, in secret. She knew that to express openly her interest in medicine would subject her to "public ridicule," and the sting of criticism she had suffered over her divorce was still an unpleasant memory. Therefore, she confided only in Dr. Hamilton, Stephen F. Chadwick, her attorney, and Jesse Applegate, all men who respected her intelligence and determination, and waited for the proper time to divulge her plans.³³

While she studied in secret Betherenia undoubtedly began to make inquiries to universities and colleges to determine where she might find acceptance as a medical student. In that era medical schools in the west were as reluctant as their eastern counterparts to admit women. Some of the opposition to admitting women probably was due to the generally accepted theory of female frailty--that women were inherently, dependent, and gynecologically diseased--and could never be strong, competent caregivers. In short, it was believed that women were more

suites by biological function and disposition to be patients rather than physicians.³⁴

The history of the suppression of women healers begins in Europe in the fourteenth century with the establishment of medicine as a profession requiring university training. This tenet laid the groundwork for barring women legally from practicing medicine, although they continued to practice midwifery for three more centuries. Witch hunts failed to eliminate women healers from medical practice but forever branded them as possibly malevolent to the superstitious. By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries women healers were so thoroughly discredited among the emerging middle classes that it was now possible, with the invention of the obstetrical forceps, for male practitioners to overtake the last preserve of female healing--midwifery. This occurred when women were legally barred from using these instruments, and they became the exclusive domain of the barber-surgeon.³⁵

In the United States, early nineteenth-century doctors, had little formal training by European standards. The existing body of medical science was extremely limited and clinical and educational facilities in America were virtually non-existent. Nevertheless, a group of middle class male doctors began to acquire minimal training and gradually superseded the female network of folk healers, midwives, and "wise women," excluding them from any possibility of acquiring training or licensing. These "regulars" treated most ills by "heroic" measures: massive bleeding, huge doses of laxative, or drugs like opium. On the other hand, the lay practitioners, mostly female, preferred mild herbal medications, dietary changes, and attentive care. "Regular" physicians

had close ties to legislative power, and by 1830 thirteen states had medical licensing laws excluding irregular practitioners, thus clearing the way for the medical establishment's monopoly on health care.³⁶

A "Popular Health Movement" emerged in the 1830s and 1840s "stirred up by feminist and working class movements," in which simple instruction in anatomy and personal hygiene, diet, and temperance encouraged each person to be a healer. From these ideas sprang Eclecticism, Grahamism, Homeopathy, and others, with each sect setting up its own medical school and graduating its own doctors. The confusion over which was authentic--the regular or the irregular--resulted in repeal of medical licensing laws in almost all states.³⁷

In 1848 the male regulars organized the American Medical Association, and throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century "relentlessly attacked lay practitioners, sectarian doctors and women practitioners in general." The few women who found acceptance at regular medical schools faced continual harassment by male students, were refused attendance at anatomy lectures, and found themselves excluded from hospital work and internships.³⁸

Women's failure to obtain training and stature in the medical profession was not due to professionalization which came chiefly in the form of extended educational requirements and licensing laws, but in the fact that the "medical establishment made a conscious effort to minimize the number of women physicians." Women had no access to the means of power which could gain them access to the profession: the educational institutions, political leverage, or the controlling medical associations. Therefore, few women had access to the "regular" schools with

standardized therapies, and the predominant pathway for women who aspired to the medical profession in that period was among the "irregulars," an alternative which often was less than satisfactory.³⁹

The policy of excluding female students came shortly after Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell obtained her medical degree from the Medical College of Geneva, New York, in 1849. When others sought to follow her, the flurry of discussion resulted in a closed-door policy. With women being systematically excluded from the medical colleges Dr. Blackwell, her sister Dr. Emily Blackwell, and Dr. Mary E. Zakrzewski organized the New York Infirmary for Women and Children in order to begin training more women doctors. Women who had been trained at this institution and the Women's Medical College of the New York Infirmary, founded in 1865, went on to found institutions where women could study in the cities of Philadelphia, Boston, and Chicago.⁴⁰

At the time Bethenia was secretly planning her medical education, the nearest school on the west coast was either in San Francisco at the Toland Medical College, founded in 1864, or the Cooper Medical School at the University of the Pacific, established in 1858. Neither accepted women. Neither did the Willamette Medical Department founded at Salem in 1867.⁴¹ Thus, physicians trained in the west often studied as apprentices under a preceptor, obtaining additional instruction in the region or at regular medical colleges in the east. These male medical professionals, however dubious their credentials, supplanted the female network of mutual help, and in many cases prevented a large number of female sufferers from obtaining the medical care they needed. Useless and bizarre treatments based on general medical ignorance of the female

reproductive system, as well as the restrictions due to female modesty, made many sufferers reticent to consult male physicians. Thus the need for female doctors with a genuine interest in helping their sex was a recognized fact among the women who sought to gain entrance to medical schools.⁴²

Eventually Bethenia's search focused on Philadelphia, a city made famous as a center of medical education by the presence of the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine and Jefferson Medical College, and at least eighteen other medical institutions.⁴³ An aura of excitement centered on the city and these schools; therefore, a diploma from a Philadelphia school represented an impressive credential to the less informed public back home. Among the features which made medical education in that city important were the opportunities to participate in the clinical lectures at the Blockley Almshouse and the Pennsylvania Hospital and ready access to the many distinguished lecturers who offered instruction to all students. Moreover, the curriculum of the eclectic schools of the city resembled the regular medical colleges with nearly identical course offerings and similar textbooks. These eclectic schools enjoyed large enrollments due to the popularity of their medical ideals and also because they were available to persons who could not afford to study at the more expensive or restricted schools. The eclectic system stressed a knowledge of basic science, anatomy and physiology, and clinical study, and claimed that they selected from all other medical technology those treatments which were most beneficial. They adopted the valuable aspects of homeopathy, electropathy, hydropathy, neuropathy, Thomism, botanic, and chromo-thermalism, and drew their

remedial resources from all of nature's domains--water, air, light, heat, electricity, magnetism, and the like, while condemning the use of blood-letting and mineral poisons and other treatments in use by other branches of medicine.⁴⁴

The full course of most of the medical colleges included a year's study and Betherenia undoubtedly considered the impact that this absence would have on her son George. Conflict over combining her roles as mother and business woman, and how this affected George had bothered her for some time. This concern is apparent in the letters which she wrote to him beginning in the early 1870s while he was at Berkeley attending the University of California. As a mother Betherenia felt it her duty to remind George that he must establish sound study patterns and maintain a high moral standard. She worried about whether or not he might take up smoking (apparently he did not), how he spent his time, and if he might be acquiring poor study habits. She seemed particularly concerned that his father, Legrand Hill, who now lived nearby in San Francisco, might provide George with an excuse to neglect his commitments.⁴⁵ For a time, father and son visited regularly, and on occasion George remained with his father in San Francisco over the weekend, missing church and some of his classes.⁴⁶ "I do not wish to deprive your father of your society," Betherenia wrote, "but I do not wish you to neglect me, nor the privilege you now have of improving your mind, your morals, and your manners, and you cannot attend to all these and spend two days out of the week in the city."⁴⁷

Betherenia found some comfort for her personal concerns in discussing the matter with Jesse Applegate who was particularly fond of George. He

told her that he wished George to write to him and let him know about his studies, "...for if I cannot always have him with me I would like to have him for a correspondent." He also assured Betherenia that she had set the stage for George's healthy development by "...imparting to him your own bright intelligence and warm affections."⁴⁸

Business trips to San Francisco or Portland, often lasting weeks at a time, distressed Betherenia. Her dual role--mother and businesswoman--demanded she consider the emotional needs of her son and herself against the responsibility of running her business efficiently and profitably. Often she was forced to choose business and it worried her. Nevertheless, she sought to explain the necessity for these absences to her son. "I am so anxious to see you and clasp you in my arms...but I must not neglect my business, for that would be neglecting you, and that I shall never do," she told him one Christmas season. Later that month when she was unable to be with him for the holiday she wrote that she was very lonely as she watched the other children getting their presents "...and my darling not here."⁴⁹

The maternal concern over her son's feelings and living arrangements (undoubtedly) was relieved when Betherenia secured a place for George at Abigail Scott Duniway's home in Portland where he would reside and help out in the printing office of the New Northwest. With her plans now focused on Philadelphia, she called on Mrs. William Lysander Adams to ask if she would take a "motherly interest" in George and visit him occasionally at the Duniways.⁵⁰ Betherenia's acquaintance with the Adamses (Inez, their eldest daughter was a lifelong friend) probably began when Adams was collector of customs for the District of Oregon at

Astoria beginning in 1861.⁵¹ Thus, when Mrs. Adams learned of Bethenia's plans to go east she suggested Bethenia visit Mr. Adams in Philadelphia where he was studying medicine at the Eclectic Medical College of Pennsylvania. It is possible that this connection may have influenced Bethenia's choice of schools, for she later enrolled there and Adams served as her preceptor.

The news that Bethenia would leave for the east to study medicine was made public in an announcement in the Astoria newspaper in late December,⁵² and, although she understood that she might meet opposition, she was not fully prepared for the angry reaction of her family and friends. Her brothers pronounced themselves "disgraced," and even George sided with them saying that her actions might do him "irreparable injury." One woman remarked that she had always given Bethenia credit for being a very smart woman, but "...indeed you must be crazy to undertake the study of medicine." Bethenia informed her detractors that they might change their minds when she returned to Roseburg a physician. Then, she said, she would be able to "charge...more for doctoring than I now get for your hats and ribbons."⁵³

With two weeks remaining before departure, Bethenia made final arrangements with a sister to manage her millinery business in Roseburg while she was away. When the time to depart finally arrived, Bethenia found herself alone at 11 o'clock at night seated in the overland stagecoach considering the criticism she had received. She realized that she was "starting out into an untried world" with only her own "unaided resources" to carry her through, and for a moment the thought of traveling all the way across the American continent in pursuit of a

dream overwhelmed her, and tears came. Then she remembered that "every sorrow of my life had provided a blessing in disguise" and this somber recollection served to renew her resolve. She considered the encouragement of friends like Dr. Hamilton, her attorney Stephen Chadwick, and Jesse Applegate--all had urged her to give full rein to her intentions to study medicine. And finally she began to think that "if there was anything in me, it should come out and come what might I would succeed. That decision comforted me."⁵⁴

Once again, Bethenia had turned her life around. The transformation from barely literate teenager, wholly dependent on her family, into a successful business woman had occurred as the result of her determination to be economically self-sufficient and personally independent. She was thirty-four years old, attractive and intelligent, and possessed of a stubborn frontier determination to succeed which had previously sustained her on flights into uncharted territory. In the darkened stagecoach bound for California,⁵⁵ Bethenia Owens plotted her future as a physician.

Notes

¹Letter from Hyman Abraham to Bethenia Owens, 17 November 1865, found in Journal 4.

²By the time he was thirty-two years old, Hyman Abraham was a successful Roseburg merchant with holdings valued at more than \$5,000. He was married to Jane Owens, Bethenia's sister, and they had two children, Marianne, four, and Sarah, 2. See statistics in MCR 1870, Douglas County, Oregon, Roseburg precinct.

³See letter from Hyman Abraham to Bethenia Owens, 17 November 1865, in Journal 4 in which he refers to his brother, Solomon Abraham, joining him in business.

⁴This description of Hyman Abraham is in Robbins, Far Western Frontier, p. 129.

⁵Clarke, Oregon, p. 488.

⁶Evans, History of the Pacific Northwest, p. 504.

⁷Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 74-79.

⁸The Roseburg Pantagraph, 5 October 1872, p. 3.

⁹Ibid., 12 October 1872, p. 3.

¹⁰Ibid., 26 October 1872, p. 3.

¹¹Robbins, Far Western Frontier, p. 132, indicates that social status in Roseburg was linked to the merchant class which comprised the largest population of the community's top social group. Among those he names as socially prominent leaders are Hyman Abraham, Dr. Salathiel Hamilton, and S. F. Chadwick.

¹²The Roseburg Pantagraph, 24 May 1873, p. 3.

¹³See the 1873 Diary of Louis F. Langenberg, pp. 75-76 at the Douglas County Museum, Roseburg.

¹⁴See Bancroft, History of Oregon, p. 421, for a biographical sketch of Mr. Owens. He died January 23, 1873 at age 65. An obituary from the Roseburg Pantagraph 7 February 1873 was found in Journal 4.

¹⁵Norman H. Clark, The Dry Years: Prohibition and Social Change in Washington (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965, p. 28, hereafter cited as Clark, Dry Years.

¹⁶ See the Oregon City Spectator, 8 July 1847, p. 1, and a follow-up on 22 July 1847, p. 4.

¹⁷ Clark, Dry Years, p. 28.

¹⁸ The Roseburg Pantagraph, 9 November 1872, p. 2.

¹⁹ Owens-Adair, Life, p. 387.

²⁰ See Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 438-39 for the article which Bethenia said appeared in 1870.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 438-39.

²² Bethenia told the Women's Congress in Portland, in 1896, that her conversion to the fight for women's rights had been affected by her reading of The Revolution. See Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 473-74.

²³ Mrs. Anthony's philosophy and advice to women is discussed in Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle: The Women's Rights Movement in the United States (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 1975), pp. 153-54, hereafter cited as Flexner, Century of Struggle.

²⁴ Letter to Jesse Applegate, 16 July 1879, in Owens-Adair, Life, p. 29, reveals the depth of Bethenia's commitment to personal autonomy.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 365.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 475.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 478.

²⁸ Mrs. Anthony wrote to Mrs. Duniway about the successful visit, thanking her for recommending she visit Mrs. Owens. See Abigail Scott Duniway, Path Breaking: An Autobiographical History of the Equal Suffrage Movement in the Pacific Coast States (Portland: James, Kerns & Abbott Co., 1914), p. 47.

²⁹ See text of the speech in the Roseburg Pantagraph, 15 March 1873, p. 2.

³⁰ Refer to "Missed it" in the Roseburg Pantagraph, 1 March 1873, p. 3.

³¹ See "Don't Like It" in the Roseburg Pantagraph, 10 August 1872, p. 2.

³² Ruth B. Moynihan, "Abigail Scott Duniway of Oregon: Woman and Suffragist of the American Frontier" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1979), pp. 448-49, hereafter cited as Moynihan, "Abigail Scott Duniway."

³³The events which stimulated Bethenia's desire to study medicine are described in Gaston, Centennial History, p. 592, and Owens-Adair, Life, p. 79 and p. 411. Hamilton, Chadwick and Applegate were lifelong supporters of Bethenia's goals in spite of popular opinion against females as physicians. Apparently they were greatly impressed by her ability and determination and accepted her as an intellectual equal.

³⁴This general theory (in regard to middle class women) is discussed in Barbara Ehrenreich and Dierdre English, For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Medical Experts' Advice to Women (Garden City, N. Y. Anchor Press, 1978), p. 92, hereafter cited as Ehrenreich and English, For Her Own Good. Working-class women, of course, were considered inherently healthy and robust.

³⁵See Barbara Ehrenreich and Dierdre English, Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers (Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1973), pp. 13-28, hereafter cited as Ehrenreich and English, Witches, Midwives, and Nurses.

³⁶Ibid., p. 21.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 22-23.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 25-28.

³⁹Mary Roth Walsh theorizes that the medical establishment made a conscious effort to minimize the number of women physicians in the nineteenth century allowing some five to six percent into medical classes to satisfy quotas. Women were further hampered in their efforts because they failed to gain any degree of major institutional control. See "Doctors Wanted: No Women Need Apply-- Sexual Barriers in the Medical Profession, 1835-1975" (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1977), pp. xiii-xiv, hereafter cited as Walsh, "Doctors Wanted". Jane B. Donegan, Women & Men Midwives: Medicine, Morality, and Misgivings in Early America (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978), pp. 219-222, hereafter cited as Donegan, Women & Men Midwives, refers to the fact that the reluctance of regular colleges to accept women students forced them to accept alternative education which was less than satisfactory.

⁴⁰For more details on the early women doctors' efforts to establish their own schools see Dr. Emily Blackwell, History of the Entrance of Women into the Regular Medical Profession in America (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons Printers, 1878), pp. 7-8. The effort to limit the number of women physicians is found in Mary Roth Walsh, "Doctors Wanted".

⁴¹The Willamette Medical Department was not highly regarded during its early years due to poor teaching, insufficient laboratory facilities, and numerous administrative problems, according to Olof Larsell, The Doctor in Oregon: A Medical History (Portland: Binford and Mort, 1947), p. 415, hereafter cited as Larsell, Doctor in Oregon.

⁴²Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, Complaints and Disorders: The Sexual Politics of Sickness (Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1979), hereafter cited as Ehrenreich and English, Complaints and Disorders, contends that it was not until 1912 that the average female patient had more than a fifty-fifty chance of benefiting from medical treatment by the average physician because of the poor state of medical technology in the nineteenth century. See their chapter on "Medical Treatments," pp. 32-37, for a chilling description of the medical ignorance of the period. Also refer to Donegan, Women & Men Midwives, pp. 203-204, which supports the idea that early women physicians like Harriot Kezia Hunt and Elizabeth Blackwell believed their misery would have been lessened had they been able to consult a woman physician.

⁴³See the announcements for twenty medical institutions located in Philadelphia during the period under discussion in American Medical Dictionary (Chicago: American Medical Association, 1918), p. 86.

⁴⁴Details on the philosophy of the eclectic schools and the methods they taught are found in Harold J. Abrahams, Extinct Medical Schools of Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966), pp. 233-35 and pp. 546-63, hereafter cited as Abrahams, Extinct Medical Schools.

⁴⁵The San Francisco, California, city directories as searched for me by Robert Rosaia of San Francisco for the years 1869 through 1881, show that Legrand Hill worked as a carpenter and lived in various transient hotels and boarding houses, moving about every nine months or so during that period. After 1881 Hill disappears from the records. Mr. Rosaia also consulted the numerous cemetery registers at Colma, the site of a number of the Bay Area's burial grounds, and found no record of death.

⁴⁶Although Legrand Hill was listed in directories as a carpenter, in later years, George Hill, a successful M.D. practicing in Yakima, Washington, referred to him as an architect. This information was provided to me by the Yakima Valley Museum and Historical Association from a "register of physicians."

⁴⁷Letter to George from Bethenia, 13 November 1870, is in Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 324-25.

⁴⁸Letter from Jesse Applegate to Bethenia, 22 June 1872, Ibid., p. 285.

⁴⁹Letter to George on 3 December 1870, and 26 December 1870, Ibid., pp. 329-330.

⁵⁰Ibid., Life, p. 80.

⁵¹William Lysander Adams (1821-1906) was a farmer, author, editor, and physician, probably best known for Treason, Stratagems, and Spoils a

"biting satire on the Oregon Democratic Party leadership" which appeared serially in the Portland Oregonian from February through March 1852. George N. Belknap, editor, of Adams' Treason, Stratagems, and Spoils (Yale University Library, the Shoe String Press, Inc., 1968), says that Adams was the best-read Oregonian of his time and an expert in the Oregon Style of vitriolic, satirical journalism. Adams came to Oregon with his family from Ohio in 1848. He was a man of great ability, owner-editor of the Oregon Argus, and appointed collector of customs at Astoria by President Lincoln in 1861. See Belknap's Introduction, pp. 1-47, for a look at this intriguing individual. Also see Inez Adams Parker's "Early Recollections of Oregon Pioneer Life" in the Special Collection, University of Oregon Library for a personal look at the Adams family. Inez Adams Parker (1845-1933) was Bethenia's best friend.

⁵²See the Astoria Tri-Weekly Astorian, 23 December 1873, p. 1, for the announcement that "Miss B. A. Owens, a well-known lady of Roseburg will shortly start for Philadelphia, where she proposes to graduate as an M.D."

⁵³Evans, History of the Pacific Northwest, p. 504.

⁵⁴Gaston, Centennial History, p. 593.

⁵⁵Stage service to southern Oregon, connecting at Jacksonville for San Francisco, was inaugurated prior to 1860, according to Winther, Great Northwest, p. 190. The California Stage Company was a Sacramento firm operated after the Civil War by Henry W. Corbett, Portland merchant and banker. The trip from Portland to San Francisco was advertised as a six-day journey.

CHAPTER VI

MRS. DOCTRESS IN THE GILDED AGE: 1874-1899

When she chose to study medicine, Betheria Owens put her frontier faith to its most severe test. Few medical schools accepted women; therefore, when she arrived in Philadelphia in 1873 she was forced to matriculate at The Eclectic Medical College of Pennsylvania for lectures and take her clinical work at the Woman's Hospital of Philadelphia with other female medical students in that city. She registered for courses in anatomy and physiology, chemistry, principles and practices of surgery, obstetrics and diseases of women and children, and *materia medica* and therapeutics. Twice a week she spent her afternoons at lectures and clinics at the Women's Hospital or Blockley Almshouse.¹ In addition to private tutoring from the dean of the school which cost an additional one hundred dollars in fees, she worked on her thesis with Dr. William Lysander Adams, of Portland, Oregon, also a student at the school.² Her thesis, entitled "Metritis," a study of uterine inflammatory disease, indicates that she probably had decided to focus her interests on gynecology.³ The college's entrance requirements were probably flexible, since matriculation was supposed to require three years of previous study before admittance, two full courses of lectures in residence, an acceptable thesis, and a final examination on medicine. Betheria had studied for several years with Dr. Hamilton in Oregon and her experience as a nurse probably qualified her under these rules. If

she entertained any doubts or confusion about her chosen vocation she had only to re-read the letters of encouragement from her supporter, Jesse Applegate. Before she left for school, Applegate had assured her that she was designed for a "higher destiny" and should avoid "love, marriage and all other entanglements and relaxations until you have attained to the high distinction to which you aspire."⁴ However, it was an accepted fact that a woman's work aspirations in the nineteenth century precluded thoughts of marriage, and after nearly twenty years as a successful single professional woman Bethenia had no reason to put marriage ahead of her career.⁵

Midway through Bethenia's first full course of lectures she went up to Boston where she rented office space and advertised her services as a practitioner from the west coast. The day after her advertising appeared she received two patients whose fees enabled her to purchase instruments and a stock of medicine. This success put Bethenia in high spirits and she decided that she would do "splendidly" at her profession. Though relatively inexperienced she was a conscientious and careful practitioner, looking up the relevant case in her medical books before treating her patient.

In this brief, first attempt at practice, Bethenia found her clientele predominantly female and working class. She said that Boston was "one of the best cities in the United States for a woman doctor." She drew this conclusion from her observation that there was a large proportion of women "thousands of whom are afflicted." Most importantly, these women seemed to "prefer a woman doctor."⁶ Indeed, sickness, exhaustion, and injury were routine in the life of working-class women

and no matter how tired or ill a woman became employers gave no time off for pregnancy or recovery from childbirth or other ailments connected with the female reproductive system. Doctors who had unlimited energy to treat the ills of frail middle-class patients had little time to spare for the poor. Thus, it appeared that Betherenia found a grateful clientele awaiting her sympathetic skills very early in her career.⁷

Her burgeoning medical practice did little to alleviate Betherenia's loneliness for her son. Letters home are poignant reminders of the vast distance that separated mother from son: "How often I think of you and wish you were here with me," she wrote. The location of her office provided a frequent reminder of her boy, for it overlooked the Boston Common, where twice weekly a hundred young cadets dressed in military uniform marched on the parade ground. At the sound of their drums Betherenia said she would search their faces--"I am always looking for you in every boy I see," she fretted.⁸

She regretted leaving Boston but in the fall returned to Philadelphia where she completed her final series of lectures at the medical college. She received the degree of Medical Doctor in 1874 and returned to Roseburg triumphant, the first Oregon woman to obtain a medical degree. Anticipating the same success she had enjoyed in the east, she hung out her shingle, and prepared to receive her first patients.⁹

A woman who presumed to practice medicine in the 1870s in a provincial town like Roseburg had set for herself an uphill course. Betherenia had thought to overcome the prejudices against female physicians by acquiring credentials and proving herself as qualified as her male

colleagues; however, she was not fully prepared for the bitter resentment and vehement rejection her town had in store for her.

A few days after her return to Roseburg, Betherenia learned that six of the town's doctors had decided to hold an autopsy on an old man who had died without funds or relatives who might raise an objection to such an operation. Dr. Palmer, whom she had embarrassed several years before, proposed that the new "Philadelphia doctor" be invited to the operation. An invitation was composed and sent by messenger boy, and although Betherenia knew this meant her no honor she agreed to attend. After giving her response to the boy she waited awhile, and then followed him to where she overheard him give her answer to the waiting doctors. A great roar arose in the room, whereupon Betherenia quietly opened the door and walked in. After she was introduced, Dr. G. W. Hoover asked Betherenia if she was aware that the autopsy was to be performed on the genital organs. "No," she answered, "but one part of the human body should be as sacred to the physician as another." Dr. Palmer's plan to discredit Betherenia had gone amiss, and she had turned the tables on him by her professional attitude and behavior. "I object to a woman being present at a male autopsy," he blustered, "and if she is allowed to remain, I shall retire!" Betherenia carefully replied that she had come by written invitation and saw no difference between males being present at a female autopsy and the present situation. A vote was taken and all agreed she could stay except Dr. Palmer who stalked out amid the "cheers and laughter of forty or fifty men and boys" who had gathered nearby to get a glimpse of the proceedings. Attention now focused on the corpse which lay on a board, covered by a worn, gray

blanket. A case of instruments was brought forward and offered to Betherenia. "You do not want me to do the work, do you," she asked in surprise. But the doctors were determined to test her mettle, and when the operation was finished she stepped back and the audience burst into cheers. Both "scandalized" and "disgusted" the crowd of thrill-seekers craned for a look at "the woman who dared" and to see what sort of "strange, anomalous being" had performed such an act. For a moment Betherenia feared she might be tarred and feathered, but then she spied her brothers Flem and Josiah among the onlookers. The Owens brothers were widely known in the community--Josiah, a farmer, and Flem, a recently elected member of the Oregon Senate.¹⁰ And although neither man agreed with his sister's behavior "they would have died in their tracks" before allowing her to be subjected to such an indignity. Flanked on either side by a tall, grim-faced brother she passed safely through the crowd because "everybody knew they would shoot at the drop of a hat." Thus, "good care was taken to lay no violent hands" on Roseburg's most notorious former milliner, and least likely to succeed female physician.¹¹

The incident had so humiliated and insulted Betherenia that she knew it was futile to remain in Roseburg to practice. She disposed of her business interests as quickly as possible and left for Portland with a sister. When she bid goodbye to her few remaining supporters she knew they were all relieved to see her go, especially her family. "It did seem as if I were a 'thorn in the flesh' to them," she later recalled.¹² The notoriety of the Roseburg operation followed Betherenia to Portland where she later admitted the publicity brought her many patients,

especially from the Roseburg area. Thus, the shameful event constituted a turning point which "added much to my purse and reputation."¹³ It seemed to bear out the belief that each of Bethenia's trials, in the end, brought its own reward.

When she arrived in Portland Bethenia formed a partnership with Dr. William Lysander Adams whom one medical authority characterized as an "able and versatile man" bolstered "by his own self-assurance."¹⁴ Dr. Adams had also received his Doctor of Medicine in Philadelphia and had served as Bethenia's preceptor at medical college. They equipped their offices with electrical and medical baths in vogue during the period. Local news columns advertised that Doctors Adams and Owens were giving medical atomizer vapor baths which were purported to do wonders in curing rheumatism (Adams' specialty) and other chronic conditions.¹⁵ The partnership flourished until the spring of 1877 when Dr. Adams decided to relocate at Hood River where he eventually founded his own clinic and drugstore.¹⁶

The "occasional rebuffs" and "frequent slights" from her "brother M.D.'s"¹⁷ failed to diminish Bethenia's enthusiasm for her career, and it appeared now that her sex seemed to be an advantage, for it brought her a measure of notoriety. The New Northwest reported that Bethenia was one of the "most successful physicians on the coast. Her patients are emphatic in her praise."¹⁸ It was said that "Nowhere in all our borders can be found a more efficient, successful or popular physician than Mrs. Dr. B. A. Owens. Those who are wont to cavil at women doctors should give her a call."¹⁹

During these years in Portland Bethenia had informally adopted a fourteen-year-old girl, Mattie Belle Palmer. The child's mother had been brought to Bethenia, critically ill with pneumonia, and before dying had begged Bethenia to look after the child. When Mattie Belle came to Bethenia she was a "puny, sickly looking little creature" in a faded and torn calico dress, stockings "tied up with strings." All of her possessions were bundled up in a red cotton handkerchief. Bethenia could not resist the pathetic little orphan. She took her into her home, educated her, and later sent her to medical school in 1884 when she professed an interest in her mother's profession. Bethenia never regretted her decision. She later said that "had I a hundred children, I am sure none could have been more faithful, or loved me better" than Mattie.²⁰

George also chose medicine as a career, entering Willamette Medical University at Salem in 1875. He was graduated in June of 1877 and began his residency at the Good Samaritan Hospital in Portland that summer. It was no secret that Bethenia had hoped George would follow in her footsteps. When he was twelve she had hinted that she had a "grand scheme" in view for him provided he study hard, and eventually her aspirations for him flowered.²¹

Despite her continued professional and social success Portland's "old school" physicians, those educated in the traditional medical institutions which excluded women, continued to snub her. Undoubtedly they were aware that The Eclectic Medical College of Pennsylvania had been embroiled in a scandal over issuing fraudulent diplomas. Bethenia's degree was authentic, earned honestly through long hours of

study, lectures, and clinical attendance, but a number of degrees given in the 1870s had been awarded illegally.²² Thus, it became increasingly important to Bethernia to gain the recognition of her colleagues by validating her credentials at a university which would be accepted by all.

Bethernia arranged for Mattie to stay with friends in Forest Grove, helped George establish himself in a practice in Goldendale, Washington, sent her sister to Mills Seminary for Women in Oakland, California, and announced her plans to go east for further medical study. "I have done my duty to those depending on me," she announced, "now I will treat myself to a full medical course in the old school, and a trip to Europe."²³ When Jesse Applegate heard of her plans he was disappointed that she would give up her successful practice in Portland to pursue another degree. "Money is a very handy thing to have," he cautioned her.²⁴ Bethernia was well aware of the benefits of having sufficient financial backing, and Applegate's advice was not lost in her haste to return east. She liquidated all of her possessions and closed her Portland office, deciding that the eight thousand dollars she had accumulated, was a worthy gamble for three years of medical training and a tour of the European clinics and medical institutions to supplement her clinical training.

Against the advice of her closest friend, Applegate, Bethernia departed September 1, 1878, for Philadelphia where she planned to petition for admittance to the renowned Jefferson Medical College, which did not then admit women. She had armed herself with what she felt was an impressive sheaf of credentials--letters from "U.S. Senators, Governors,

Professors and Doctors" and she did not expect to be turned away.²⁵ Although the credentials greatly impressed one Professor Gross, a leading surgeon on the Jefferson faculty, the board of regents flatly refused to consider a woman medical student.²⁶ Bethenia refused to consider one of the women's medical colleges, because "a Woman's College out West stands below par, and I must have a degree that is second to none." Professor Gross suggested that she apply to the University of Michigan, whose medical department ranked among the highest and which had recently begun admitting women. Bethenia departed immediately for Ann Arbor where she arrived in time to be admitted for fall term.²⁷

Although she probably was considered middle-aged by most of her classmates, at age thirty-eight, Bethenia approached her course of study with the same energy and determination which had served her so well in the past. For nine months she averaged sixteen-hour days, immersed in lectures, clinics, and study. She customarily arose at four in the morning, took a cool bath, exercised vigorously, and studied until breakfast at seven. The balance of the day was given over to learning the latest medical technology. On the weekends she took a break believing that "two good sermons...and a church social now and then" brought rest and "acted as a safety-valve to our overheated brains."²⁸ In high spirits and excellent health, she wrote to Jesse Applegate that her initial trepidation at undertaking scientific studies had all but disappeared and that she now felt certain she was on "the right road." She credited his steady encouragement for making it possible, telling him that "God knows how often I have blessed you for that encouragement, though it did then seem an impossibility."²⁹

Though she seems to have accepted the fact that a career woman of her era had to forgo marriage, she continued an old debate with Jesse Applegate which had begun in her years as a student in Philadelphia when he had advised her to set aside affairs of the heart to concentrate on matters of the intellect. Perhaps fearing that his friend might never remarry (she was close to forty) he now began to encourage her to consider marriage. He was in contact with a number of her old friends and former suitors in Roseburg and perhaps thought to convince Bethenia to consider marriage after medical school. However, Bethenia told Applegate she believed she could "do more good" in life as a physician. Applegate alludes most frequently to Asher Marks, a successful Roseburg merchant, who had actively pursued Bethenia when she lived there. Marks was certainly among the city's most eligible bachelors, a Polish emigre and closely identified with Douglas County business and politics.³⁰ When Applegate urged her not to forget her feminine nature Bethenia admitted that "the longings of my heart reach out toward the other" (presumably Marks), but circumstances and regulations of her school precluded marriage. She set aside her personal feelings and vowed "to make up for the loss by a life well spent."³¹

Bethenia also had philosophical objections to marriage which seemed even more significant than the prevailing idea that career and marriage would not blend successfully. She told Applegate at one point that she objected to Marks as a husband, because his ideas of woman's position (sphere) did not run "exactly in the groove" with her own. Apparently Marks could not accept the fact that she would choose career over marriage. She believed that should she ever accept his proposal he

would be "a happier man than he ever could have been" with a wife whose self-fulfillment could integrate the elements of profession and the traditional female role.³²

When it appeared that Betherenia was more committed to her profession than to any considerations of the heart Jesse Applegate wrote Betherenia saying he feared his advice to pursue knowledge would be "too dearly paid for" if it was gained at the expense of happiness. He reported that he had met recently with Marks who continued to see Betherenia as a "bright, beautiful woman...inspiring love." Applegate advised Betherenia she had better keep this suitor in reserve, suggesting that perhaps she might accept Marks' proposal upon her return from Europe.³³ Apparently Betherenia and Applegate differed on the definition of happiness for her: for Applegate it meant marriage, for Betherenia it meant career.

Nevertheless, Betherenia's fondness for Marks continued. When she was graduated from the University of Michigan's medical school in September 1880³⁴ she sent Marks a piece of material from the dress she was making for commencement. Apparently Marks felt the inexpensive material was not grand enough for his "Angie," for he wrote back to thank her saying "Never mind darling some day you shall have a better one--with a sweet kiss." He was very proud of his friend, in spite of her refusal to consider his proposals, and had placed notices in the Portland and Salem papers announcing that she was to be graduated with honors from her university.³⁵

Betherenia was in Chicago completing a residency when her son George joined her in October 1880 to attend lectures and clinics. Although women medical students now had full access to most hospitals they still

suffered an occasional "rotten-egging" and were often reminded in the press that by stepping out of the traditional female role they had merely proved themselves to be a "strong-minded nuisance" or a "mannish woman." Betherenia analyzed these continuing prejudices as archaic, and later said that "repeated refusals have only acted as a stimulant rather than a sedative."³⁶

When her residency was finished, Betherenia and George and two women physicians Betherenia had studied with in Ann Arbor sailed for Europe where they attended a number of lectures and clinics to advance their technical and surgical knowledge. After a few weeks George declared himself homesick and eager to return to Goldendale where his sweetheart, Anna Williamson, was waiting. Betherenia provided George with a return ticket, and five hundred dollars as a marriage gift,³⁷ and she and her two companions continued their tour of European medical institutions.

In June Betherenia received a letter from a sick friend in Portland imploring her to return home to treat her. She cut short her tour, returned to Portland, renting offices over the Plummer drugstore at First and Main, and began practice as a physician specializing in the "Diseases of Women, and the Eye and Ear." Although she continued to believe in the efficacy of eclectic treatment she no longer wished to be associated with the odious epithet "bath doctor" which had lost much of its former popularity and now smacked of quackery.³⁸ She was now a full-fledged University-trained physician and surgeon, she told her former patients, and soon these skills were bringing in an income of over six hundred dollars a month.

Bethenia often remarked that it was natural that women patients found great solace in being attended by a female physician, but unfortunately for those sufferers medicine had become a white-male, middle-class occupation.³⁹ Female physicians were a rarity, surgeons even more so. In 1880, the year Bethenia graduated, there were 2,431 women physicians in the United States out of a total of 85,671; in San Francisco they constituted 3.4 percent of the physicians and in New York only 5.0. The national average for female physicians in 1880 was a mere 2.8 percent and had risen to only 4.4 percent by 1930.⁴⁰ These facts appeared to work to Bethenia's advantage, bringing her a large following of women whose female modesty undoubtedly prevented them from consulting a male physician for advice on gynecological problems. One of the first major operations Bethenia performed was a perineal repair. She was assisted by a Dr. Carpenter, professor of surgery at Willamette University who administered chloroform, and a Dr. Cardwell. This operation was "the first performed in Oregon by a woman" and gained her a fee of "one hundred dollars in gold twenty-dollar pieces."⁴¹ This case brought her wide fame, not however, in the same sense as did the autopsy seven years before. Soon her waiting room was filled with women who had heard that Dr. Owens could perform an operation that would "give them some comfort in the world." Undoubtedly they were referring to the same operation, now known as "perineal repair," which she called a "complete procidentia." This procedure to correct uterine prolapse mitigated the effects of repeated childbearing or gynecological disease.⁴²

In addition to helping middle-class women who could afford her surgical skills, Bethenia was also a "loyal and powerful champion of her

own sex" who disregarded public opinion by venturing in to Portland's red light district to assist women in need of treatment. On one occasion she was called to Portland's "demi-monde" where she entered a handsomely furnished residence, thronged with "beautifully dressed women" who were receiving their male guests in an atmosphere where "music and gaiety prevailed." Upstairs, Betherenia found a young woman of fifteen, critically ill, suffering from peritonitis. Betherenia had her removed to quarters near her home where she could supervise treatment. She learned later that the young woman was a runaway who had been induced to work for the "house of ill fame" through promises of "pleasant work and better wages." When the patient was recovered, Betherenia interested some Portland women in the case, and plans were formed for establishing a home of refuge for similar unfortunate women. She solicited subscriptions which enabled the young woman to return to her home in San Francisco, and the balance of these funds formed the nucleus of the W.C.T.U. Refuge Home, later called the Florence Crittenton Home, in Portland.⁴³

Venturing into the red light district and speaking out against the double standard of morality which prevailed in the Victorian Age were not the only topics which caused provincial Portlanders to raise their eyebrows at Mrs. Doctor Owens. She lectured frequently and wrote numerous letters to area newspapers extolling the benefits of vigorous physical activity for women of all ages. Betherenia blamed much of her sex's health problems on slavish devotion to outdated customs and ridiculous fashions. She scoffed at the myth of female frailty saying that a woman's nervous system is too often developed at the expense of

the physical. She recommended that women do as she did: ride astride, throw away their silly hats and tight fitting corsets and restrictive clothing, and, above all, exercise. Portland was scandalized when she prescribed that young women skate vigorously enough to "at least start perspiration." This exhilarating sport would "give tonicity" to their muscles and enable them to sleep "without the aid of choloral [sic]."⁴⁴

In spite of this rather unconventional behavior Betherenia's credentials and her professional reputation were sufficient to gain her admittance to the Oregon State Medical Society in June of 1882. Following her acceptance she was asked to give a paper on "Retarded Dentition" at the association's annual meeting the following year.⁴⁵

In 1884, Mattie Belle Palmer (now twenty-three), the orphan whom Betherenia now referred to as her daughter, expressed an interest in studying medicine. Mattie's intellectual gifts had undoubtedly been nurtured along the same lines as those of George, and, naturally, Betherenia was delighted with Mattie's choice. After Mattie was graduated from Willamette University in 1886 she did not practice medicine on her own, but it is possible that she continued to live with Betherenia and assist her mother in her busy practice. For reasons of her own she chose not to marry, possibly influenced by her mother's devotion to a profession which seemed to exclude marriage. Those who knew Mattie said she had a "fine mind" and a "most excellent memory" so that she was a "good authority on almost any subject." Betherenia characterized her beautiful, intelligent daughter as "a most honest and loving nature," a young woman with a disposition that was both "pleasant and sunny." She



Figure 2. Colonel John Adair, Bethenia Owens-Adair (standing), and Mattie Belle Palmer.

also was extremely shy and preferred to lead a quiet life, living at home with her mother.⁴⁶

"Health, hosts of friends, and unbroken prosperity" marked the next few years. Betherenia had chosen to remain unmarried, honestly believing that she was "married to her profession." But as she herself said later, there comes a time when one is "willing to add another name" to one's own.⁴⁷ It was April, 1884, and Oregon was about to vote on the Woman Suffrage Amendment. Betherenia had scanned the list of arrivals from Astoria looking for C. W. Fulton, state senator from that district, whom she knew to be a sympathizer to the cause. She located him at his Portland hotel and was asked to join him and three gentlemen friends: Colonel John Adair and his two brothers, William and S. D., all of Astoria. Betherenia had not seen the Adairs for many years, but they made "a jolly party, all talking Woman Suffrage" as they breakfasted with Senator Fulton.⁴⁸

Colonel Adair's father, General John Adair, Astoria's first customs collector appointed by President Polk in 1849,⁴⁹ had been "warm friends" with Tom Owens, Betherenia's father, both sharing a background as Kentuckians from well-to-do families. General Adair and his wife Mary Ann and their six children had arrived in Astoria in 1849 crossing the Isthmus of Panama on foot and traveling by steamer to San Francisco and Astoria. The Adairs began housekeeping in a primitive cabin, and soon Mary Ann, accustomed to the comforts and conveniences of a well-to-do eastern home, had made a gracious home. Into this primitive setting, General Adair brought a lovely piano, the first instrument of its kind in the territory.⁵⁰

The Adairs, a cultured and educated family, naturally sought schooling for their children but found that the frontier settlement at Astoria had only "seven or eight families" not nearly enough for a school.⁵¹ Their eldest son, "Johnny," as his mother referred to him, was sent out to the little school on Clatsop Plains when he was ten to board with the Condit family, and it was probably there that John Adair first met Bethenia Owens. She remembered him as a "large, Handsome boy of his age, with the most beautiful curly auburn hair imaginable."⁵²

In 1855, at the age of sixteen, John was the first cadet from Oregon appointed to the military academy at West Point by General Joseph Lane, Oregon's delegate to Congress.⁵³ He was sent first to Fort Vancouver where he met Colonel Benjamin Bonneville, the commandant, and Captain U. S. Grant and Lieutenant Philip Sheridan. In the spring of 1856 he left for the academy via San Francisco and Panama. Later, in Washington, D.C., he was introduced to President Franklin Pierce who professed a great interest in Oregon.⁵⁴

In those days, the course at the Military Academy consisted of five years of study. John was graduated thirteenth in a class of forty-five cadets May 6, 1861. Twenty-two members of the class were in the Battle of Bull Run, July 21, 1861,⁵⁵ but John was sent to Washington where he was "assigned to have charge of President Lincoln's guard of twenty men." During this tour of duty he stayed at the White House. Although he was initially prejudiced against President Lincoln because of his own family's slave-holding past, he was won over by the President's somber concern over the conflict that was dividing the nation. "Try as I could to hate Lincoln," he said later, "I found it impossible to do." The

President questioned John about Oregon and when they had become better acquainted he revealed that he had known John's grandfather, the governor of Kentucky.⁵⁶ During these conversations John told President Lincoln that he would rather return west to fight Indians "than to have to fight my own people." The President replied "So would I John, so would I." It is not known if the President granted John his wish. Army records report that John Adair was dismissed in 1861.⁵⁷ One historian says that Adair was commissioned and assigned to Walla Walla and then to Washington Territory, but deserted and fled to Victoria, British Columbia, and following this action he was dismissed from service.⁵⁸ A similar account indicates that Adair was ordered to join a company of dragoons, declined duty, and was dropped from the Army rolls.⁵⁹ The Salem Statesman flatly stated that John Adair was "a deserter, and now in the British army, to the everlasting disgrace of the name Adair."⁶⁰ This comment, typical of the acerbic "Oregon Style" of journalism, also noted that it was a shame that none of Oregon's cadets were in the Union Army.

The circumstances surrounding John Adair's army career following his graduation from West Point remain in question. Mary Ann Adair's journal contains no mention of her son during these years, and no information has been passed on to his descendants. However, any odium that existed over Adair's military history had been forgiven by 1874 when he was appointed Brigadier General of the State Militia. It was a "very good appointment indeed," agreed the Weekly Astorian.⁶¹

Colonel Adair,⁶² as he was now known, and his brother, Samuel D. Adair, established a salmon cannery at Astoria in 1874, riding the crest

of a salmon boom which would see more than fifty-five canneries operating on the Columbia River within the next ten years. Colonel sold his share of the business to his brother William in 1881 and remained in Astoria where he continued to invest in real estate.⁶³ He and Samuel had purchased several thousand acres of tideland near Astoria in 1877 and were intent on reclaiming these areas for commercial development. Colonel envisioned productive farm lands and eventual railroad access to the future townships of Sunnymead, Merriwether Downs, Warrenton Park, and New Astoria.⁶⁴

It would seem that the handsome, dynamic promoter from Astoria, a forty-five year old bachelor of a prominent family and rumored to be wealthy in his own right, swept Bethenia's objections to marriage aside, for within weeks her "love for him knew no bounds."⁶⁵ By June the couple had decided to marry, and Colonel wrote to his brother William asking if he would be best man. William returned congratulations and said he was pleased at his brother's "great happiness" and the fact that he had secured "so rich a prize." William assured his brother that "We all know her to be a very superior character and cannot but regard you as a very fortunate man."⁶⁶

Early in July the New Northwest reported that "invitations are out for the wedding" for "one of Portland's best known physicians."⁶⁷ The invitations, engraved on heavy cream-colored stock were an engraved letter "O" superimposed over a graceful "A" symbolizing the joining of the two names.⁶⁸

On Thursday evening July 24, 1884, the wedding party proceeded down the aisle of the First Congregational Church, Second and Jefferson

Streets in Portland, to the soft strains of Mendelssohn's wedding theme. The ceremony was solemnized by the Reverend Dr. Frederick R. Marvin and witnessed by a large audience of relatives and friends from throughout the state. Bethenia wore a wedding gown of cream-colored brocaded silk with a long train and a Queen Elizabeth collar of delicate lacy trim. Her dark hair was upswept in the latest fashion--"a la Pompadour" and she wore "diamonds." She and the attendants Maud Hobson and Myra Abrahams (her nieces) carried bouquets of fresh summer flowers. William Adair stood by his brother as best man, and the groomsmen included Joseph N. Teal, Hamilton Corbett, William Ott, Hamilton Brooke, and James Goldsmith. When the wedding party and guests departed from the church a number of passers-by recognized the wedding couple and cheered and waved. Later that evening guests gathered at the home of Hyman and Jane Abraham, the bride's relatives, at their residence at No. 60 North Twelfth Street in Portland. Sarah Owens, now a widow,⁶⁹ and General and Mrs. John Adair were among the guests. Next day the newlyweds rested at the Adair family home in Astoria and then departed on a month-long wedding trip on the steamer State of California bound for San Francisco.⁷⁰

When they returned to Portland late in August the couple lived at 241 First Street where Mrs. Doctor Owens-Adair, as she would now be called, had adjoining offices. Colonel kept an office for business purposes at No. 3-1/2 Washington Street.⁷¹ It is probable that their household also included Mattie who had always lived with her mother except for periods when she was away at school.

Bethenia was enchanted by her new husband who was "an optimist of a happy and cheerful disposition." She excused Colonel's one fault--he was a man who "is usually among the clouds, and rarely gets down to terra firma"--because her infatuation suffered the myopia of those in love. Because of the trust she placed in Colonel she was easily convinced by his vision that they would realize "millions in the near future" when she invested in his tidelands project. Furthermore, she had an income of "fully \$7,000" yearly at the time of her marriage, and so it appeared that she could well afford to speculate.⁷²

In April 1885, she confided to her friend Inez Adams Parker that she had never been healthier or happier, attributing this to a devoted husband. It was a "great blessing" at this stage in her life (she was forty-six) to have found companionship with a man she could turn to at all times for "consolation and advice."⁷³

Bethenia learned she was pregnant during the spring of 1886. In her state of elation she began to visualize how she would take her infant daughter with her on her rounds so that the baby could "imbibe the love of the profession not only from her mother's milk, but by constant association."⁷⁴ Jesse Applegate wrote to congratulate her on her happiness. He twitted her gently, saying "I hear nothing from you about woman's rights...Has a good and loving husband proved to be all that a woman needs to make her happy in this world?" He assured her that when the little "god" had "done his work" and when she had finished her "dalliance with sensual love" she would return to her former ways and they could continue their dialogue on issues of this sort.⁷⁵ A few weeks later Bethenia received the shocking news that her brother Flem

was dead. Flem was the tender-hearted brother who had comforted her when she left Legrand Hill, who had helped protect her from a crowd of angry Roseburg citizens, and who shared her commitment to temperance. He was instrumental in the founding of The Prohibition Star, a temperance newspaper and was regarded as a "flaming evangelist for Prohibition."⁷⁶ As manager of the Roseburg Grange Flem apparently had miscalculated the markets, and as a result the Grange's accounts had fallen deficient by \$150,000. Although Flem was not personally to blame, and there was no taint of corrupt dealing associated with the deficit, local agents had attacked him in the streets of Roseburg demanding an accounting. Overcome with remorse by his part in the Grange's failure, he had committed suicide. The coroner's inquest related the facts of the tragedy, stating that Flem Owens had put a "Smith & Wesson revolver to his head on the left side and sent a ball crashing through his brains." A Roseburg minister eulogized Flem as "a leading man in the community" known for his "generous impulses" and summarized the loss as a great tragedy.⁷⁷ It is unlikely that Betherenia could attend the funeral as she was in the last trimester of pregnancy.

In October the Tri-Weekly Astorian announced that The Prohibition Star would resume publication "having been relieved of the financial embarrassment occasioned by the suicide of W.F. Owens."⁷⁸ And with the birth of her baby less than three months away Betherenia tentatively accepted the presidency of the Prohibition Publishing Society, a corporation, and immediately fired off letters to the stockholders to make arrangements for the editorial management of the publication. Apparently she assumed this responsibility both for her own interest in

furthering the organization and to absolve any hard feelings over the losses it might suffer over her brother's actions. The organization accepted her plans for the hiring of writers and editors, the evaluation of stock options and salaries, and named her president of the organization on December 26, 1886.⁷⁹

The daughter that Betheria had so eagerly anticipated was born at noon in Portland on January 28, 1887. She was given the name Mary Anna, probably after Colonel's mother. The Tri-Weekly Astorian reported that Betheria was the mother of a "fine healthy daughter" and that "mother and child are doing extremely well." However, the report was premature for the child contracted pneumonia and within three days was dead.⁸⁰

The loss of the daughter which Betheria had longed for plunged her into deep depression. "For three days only, was she left with us, and then my treasure was taken from me," she mourned. Her grief was so excessive that she could not bear being separated from Colonel so she closed her practice in Portland saying that "I can have a practice anywhere." The open marriage which allowed both she and Colonel the freedom to engage in their professions, living apart for extended periods, was at an end. She left her circle of friends, meetings, and professional associations and moved to Astoria where she gradually resumed her medical practice. Two years passed slowly and her health deteriorated so severely that she called for an attorney and drew up a will. However, her time "had not yet come" and she recovered slowly from the typhus fever which had made her so ill. Colonel urged her to take up residence in the country, on farmland he had purchased near Clatsop Plains, about five miles southwest of Astoria. He convinced her

that the pure, fresh air of the country at Sunnymead Farm would help her regain her health and promised that in "less than two years railroad trains will be running across our land, and our fortunes will be assured, and you will never need to work again."⁸¹

Weak and depressed, she assented, and on July 1, 1888, she and Colonel and Mattie moved out to Sunnymead Farm where they remained for the next eleven years. As Betherenia's health returned she resumed her professional work as a country doctor--a practice vastly different from the clientele she had seen in the city. She prided herself on the fact that she never once refused a call "day or night, rain or shine," but that was on Portland's city streets where she traveled in a horse-drawn buggy. Now she was often compelled to travel on foot or astride her horse--bundled in blankets against the dense fogs or torrential coastal rainstorms, along trails so overhung with undergrowth and obstructed by logs and roots that a rider had to precede her with an axe to cut a pathway through fallen underbrush. Colonel frequently objected to these nighttime calls, but Betherenia felt duty-bound to attend to her patients whatever the personal hardship.⁸²

In addition to her professional duties Betherenia worked in the house and on the farm, frequently taking over the management of the place in Colonel's absence. Now their family expanded with the arrival of Victor, George Hill's son, in 1888 following the death of his wife, Anna.⁸³ Victor, a lively two-year-old toddler, was a happy addition to the already contented family. In January 1890, Mattie wrote in her diary that "Victor (now four years old) amused us with his pranks and mischief," on winter evenings and "Col [sic] has been reading Edward

Bellamy's Looking Backward and the papers." On another occasion she wrote that "Sallie and Victor had a romp before their bed-time," (Sallie was Bethenia's twelve-year-old niece). Later she wrote that Bethenia was away for a few days attending a stockholder's meeting of the Prohibition Publishing Society in Portland. When Bethenia returned she resumed her usual activities--"Dr. is cutting out a dress for Sallie," and "Dr. got a nice dinner to-day." Apparently, Bethenia tolerated the children's pranks with good humor, for Mattie reported that "Victor jumped on his grandma's back while she was putting pies in the oven, and pulled her down on the floor," and repeated this mischief when the pies were ready to be removed. He was "held in disgrace" by all for only a short time but not long enough to "interfere with his enjoyment of the piecrust, which he said was nice." On another occasion Mattie wrote that "Dr was late getting home...Sallie started to meet her at three thirty, so we were very much worried...Col and Jim set out at half past six with lanterns, and at nine-oclock brought home the lost ones."⁸⁴

It was an accepted fact within the family circle that Bethenia loved children. From time to time her "humane impulse" caused her to take in a foster child or two, or perhaps a niece or nephew, for a temporary period. Thus, it is not surprising that in 1891 she accepted another child into the family circle. In 1906 she wrote in her autobiography that "In 1891 I officiated at the birth of a boy whose mother gave me her child. I took the little orphan to my bosom, and gave it a share of my mother-love, and, with my husband's consent, I called him John Adair, Jr."⁸⁵

These few lines in Betherenia's autobiography provide only a hint of the events which took place at Sunnymeade Farm between the winter of 1890 and the fall of 1891. It is known that on October 7, 1891, Betherenia assisted in the delivery of an infant, born at Sunnymeade Farm. The birth of this child, John Adair, Jr., was recorded in the Adair Family Bible in Colonel Adair's handwriting. He wrote that the child, John Adair, Jr., was the fourth in the line of John Adairs.⁸⁶ The Adair family has always accepted the fact that Mattie Belle Palmer was the child's mother, and that Colonel Adair was his father.⁸⁷

Mattie probably learned that she was pregnant sometime in January or February of 1890. Since both she and her mother were physicians, had there been any doubt in either's mind about keeping the child, they could easily have terminated the pregnancy. They chose not to do so, no doubt, for several reasons. First, the father of the child was Colonel Adair. It is not known whether Colonel or Mattie were in love, or whether he had seduced her or had forced her to submit to his sexual advances. If they had been engaged in a love affair it is highly unlikely that Betherenia would have kept them both close to her, or that she would have written about both her daughter and husband with such affection in her later writings. What is more probable is that Colonel seduced Mattie or forced his attentions on her, regretted his actions, and they never spoke of the matter until the discovery that she was pregnant. Upon this discovery the two women, possibly excluding the Colonel, discussed what they must do. Betherenia was fifty years old, undoubtedly unable to have more children and possibly aware that her husband longed for a son to carry on the Adair line. She may have

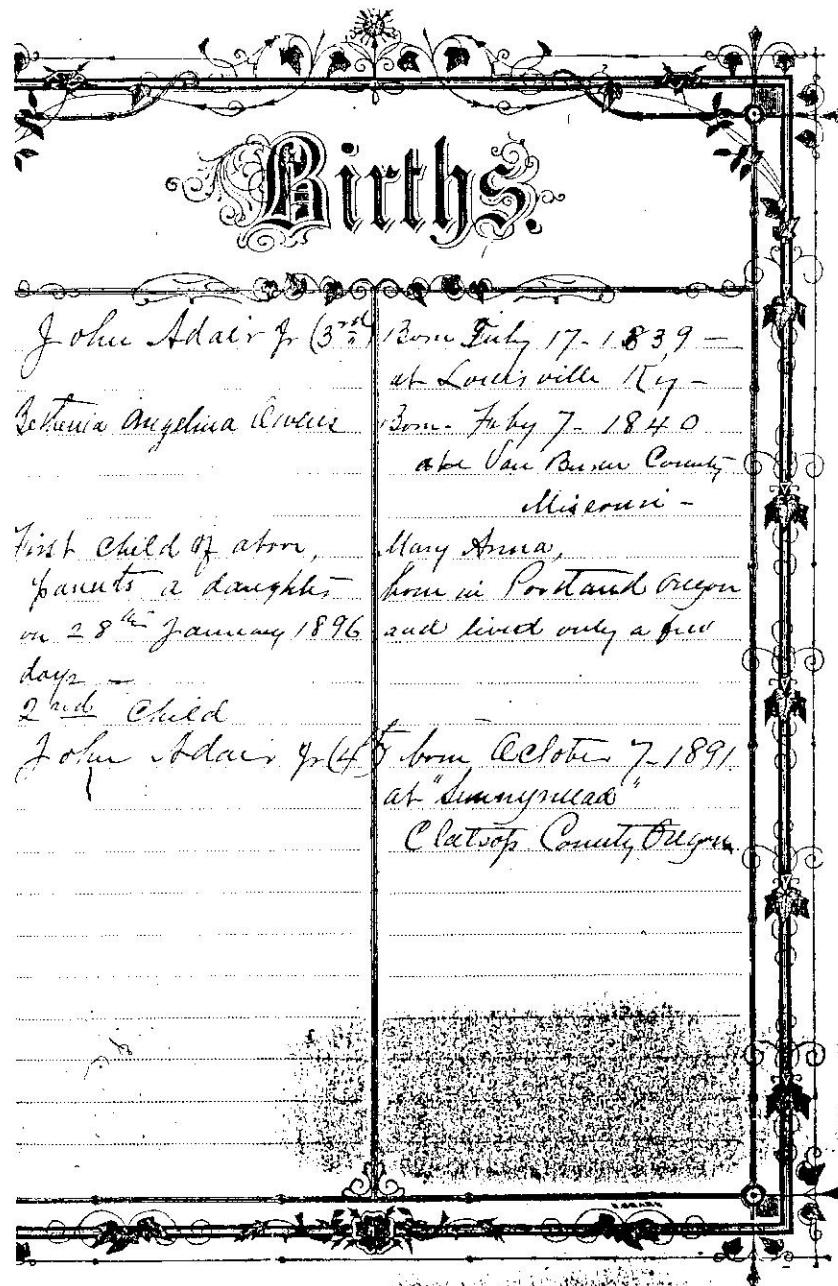


Figure 3. The Adair Family Bible.

discussed this with Mattie and with Mattie's assent encouraged her to keep the child, conceal its origins, and allow Colonel and Betherenia to rear and adopt the child as the Adair heir. Mattie's decision would have been equally difficult. As a physician, she may have believed it unethical to abort the child. She was thirty years old, very likely had no desire to marry, and it is possible she may have wished to keep the child so that she could experience motherhood. It is also possible that Colonel and Betherenia pressed her to bear the child so that they could have the son that he desired--a decision that twentieth-century women would refer to as surrogate motherhood.⁸⁸ The precise discussion and solution of this sensitive matter were never revealed to any of the Adair descendants, but all have accepted the fact that Colonel and Mattie were the natural parents of John Adair, Jr.

Mattie continued to live on the farm, leaving only briefly for a month-long visit to Chicago with George and Hattie Hill in 1893.⁸⁹ A letter written to her mother just six days before her death, has only one mention of her son. Mattie is describing the children's excitement upon receiving letters from Betherenia who was in Chicago visiting the World's Fair in October 1893. "We are all so glad when your letters come!" Mattie wrote to Betherenia. "Victor's eyes get big, and John says, 'Hurrah for mamma and the big fair' as we have taught him."⁹⁰ Thus it appears that the family considered Betherenia as John's mother and were teaching him to refer to her in that manner.

The portrait Betherenia sketches of her daughter throughout the pages of her autobiography does not represent Mattie as a tragic figure. She was always Betherenia's "dear, good Mattie Belle" a cherished child whom

she loved and admired for her many exemplary qualities of womanhood. It is more likely that these events wounded Bethenia. It was she who had to accept the fact that she would never be able to give Colonel the son he desired, and who had mourned the death of their only child until her health was in danger. And it was she who must have suffered at Colonel's infidelity, and worried over the pain that his behavior had undoubtedly caused her daughter. Ultimately Colonel, Bethenia, and Mattie worked out a solution which allowed them to continue to live together, at ease, on the farm, and they concealed the events in a way which satisfied Astoria society. However, Bethenia's comment "Now, as I look back, I realize that that move [to Sunnymead] was one of the greatest mistakes of my life,"⁹¹ probably reveals the depth of her true feelings. She had removed herself from the excitement of her medical practice in Portland and its bright social life for eleven years of isolation in the country, a rural practice, domestic upheaval, and personal anguish. One can only marvel at the courageous manner in which she maintained her family's dignity and continued to face society.

Mattie Belle died October 16, 1893, at home, at Sunnymead farm. Her death was unexpected, following a very brief illness and was "a grievous affliction" to Bethenia and Colonel. Bethenia's memorial to her daughter is contained in her autobiography, and she includes numerous letters of condolence she received from those "who knew our good child well." Bethenia praised Mattie's intelligence and sunny nature saying that "her presence in our home was always most agreeable, and her loss can only be obviated by the years that must come and go." She added that "We miss her every day and hour, and can hardly reconcile

ourselves to believe that she will never again occupy her chair." Mattie, born September 23, 1861, in Indiana, was only thirty-two years old at the time of her death.⁹²

On April 9, 1898, Colonel and Bethenia formally adopted John Adair, Jr. They appeared at the Clatsop County courthouse in Astoria where they testified that "the parents of said child are not now living nor has said child any relatives known to petitioners or to this court."⁹³

Gradually Bethenia returned to political and reform activities during the late 1880s. She was now involved in the management of the Prohibition Publishing Society, she became involved in the organization of a third-party movement which fought liquor interests, she pushed forward a new bill to raise the age of consent for marriage from fourteen to sixteen for women,⁹⁴ and continued to work for woman suffrage.

On August 10, 1889, Bethenia attended a meeting in Salem. Representatives from the Patrons of Husbandry, Knights of Labor, Prohibitionists, Union Laborites, suffragists, and Grangers were intent on forming a coalition party which would work against saloons, trusts and corporations, "land grabbers," and those involved in ballot corruption. These groups felt that Republicans and Democrats had failed to oppose these evils and that none of the minor parties had been strong enough to gain sufficient political power to oppose them. There was general sentiment of hope among these reform elements that they could coalesce and have a significant impact on future elections. Following resolutions and a statement of purpose, they adopted the name Union Party suggested by "Mrs. Owens-Adair of Astoria."⁹⁵ Former Governor Stephen F. Chadwick (Bethenia's attorney in the divorce from Legrand Hill) wrote that he

thought the Union Party quite respectable. He alluded to Betheria's role in selecting the name of the party, saying "Great credit is due you for the name."⁹⁶

Woman suffrage also continued to be a primary concern among Betheria's political activities. In May, 1896, she received a letter from Abigail Scott Duniway, president of the State Equal Suffrage Association, inviting her to address the First Oregon Congress of Women at their Portland meeting in June.⁹⁸ The talk that Betheria prepared for the conference on woman's work or ambitions restated her main premise, one that she had voiced so many times: "Is there any difference between woman's work and man's work. Is there anything under the sun that muscle or mind can do that the new woman cannot accomplish?" As always she drove home the point that a woman's "muscles and mind are just as susceptible of being strengthened and cultivated as are those of man." Her speech also paid tribute to Mrs. Duniway whom she had "assisted in starting the first suffrage paper in Oregon," and Susan B. Anthony, also present, whose newspaper The Revolution, she said, was responsible for her conversion to woman suffrage.⁹⁹ If there was a break between Betheria and Mrs. Duniway as one authority has suggested, it was not apparent in the words of praise which Betheria directed to her in that speech in 1896.¹⁰⁰

The rigors of country practice, social commitments, political activities, and, finally, the onset of rheumatism left Betheria exhausted and in low spirits. Colonel urged her to try a change of scene, so in the fall of 1898 they traveled to Yakima, Washington, where they visited George and Hattie. Betheria discovered that the "high altitude

and change worked like magic." She said she felt twenty years younger and was relieved of rheumatism. Adding to her troubles was the fact that Colonel had not done well in his real estate speculation, and the financial burden had become overwhelming. She confided this information to George who urged her to let the farm go, consider her health, and set up a practice in Washington where she would soon make a good income. Colonel felt that it was a "terrible thing to give up our home at our age," but Betherenia insisted that their \$24,000 debt at ten percent interest was crippling them both and threatening to eat away all of their hard-earned income. Colonel agreed with the decision, and they began making arrangements to leave Sunnymead.¹⁰¹

In the midst of packing Betherenia had an accident which almost proved fatal. On April 5 the Astoria Daily Budget reported that Betherenia had been packing, went to her pantry for a refreshing drink, poured out a substance which she thought was a raspberry tonic, and fell to the floor in a semi-conscious state. She aroused herself and found that the liquid was sulfuric acid, possibly used as a cleaning compound. She consumed a pint of cream to relieve her stomach and sent for her sister-in-law, Mrs. William Adair, who administered "restoratives." Betherenia recovered almost immediately, and on April 6 she and Colonel were settled comfortably in their new home.¹⁰² Three days after she and Colonel and the children arrived in North Yakima, Betherenia performed an operation which brought her a fee of one hundred dollars and "so business came, as in former days."¹⁰³

Notes

¹Evans, History of the Pacific Northwest, p. 504.

²Dr. Adams' acquaintance with Bethenia Owens was discussed previously in Chapter 5, footnote 50.

³Both Dr. Adams and Bethenia Owens are listed among the graduates of the Eclectic Medical College of Pennsylvania. Adams was working on a specialty in rheumatism. See Abrahams, Extinct Medical Schools, p. 289.

⁴Letter from Jesse Applegate, 20 November 1873, in Owens-Adair, Life, p. 287.

⁵Career women of the nineteenth century for the most part had to forgo marriage, according to Carl Degler, At Odds: Women and Family in America from the Revolution to the Present (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). Degler points to the fact that in 1890 more than half of women doctors were single, thus illustrating the difficulty of combining career and marriage.

⁶Owens-Adair, Life, p. 332.

⁷The plight of working-class women and the dearth of humane medical treatment for them is discussed in Ehrenreich and English, Complaints and Disorders, pp. 45-50.

⁸Letter to George, 18 May 1874, in Owens-Adair, Life, p. 332.

⁹Larsell, Doctor in Oregon, p. 415.

¹⁰See David C. Duniway's broadside "Members of the Legislature, State of Oregon 1860-1949" (Salem: Oregon State Library, 1949), no page.

¹¹The autopsy performed in Roseburg is a key scene in the sensitive treatment of Bethenia Owens-Adair in a play The Northwest Woman, written by Dorothy Velasco with the assistance of Dr. Edwin R. Bingham, Professor of History at the University of Oregon, and first performed in Portland, Oregon, 1 April 1980. The incident is described in detail in Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 83-85 (written in 1905), the basis of my account. Over the years the shame of that incident gradually diminished, but in 1889 it was included in Elwood Evans, History of the Pacific Northwest: Oregon and Washington. However, by 1912 the event apparently had lost its sting for it appeared in two widely read accounts of Oregon's notable citizens: Joseph Gaston's The Centennial History of Oregon, and S. J. Clarke's Oregon, Pictorial and Biographical. In 1922 when Bethenia published Human Sterilization (self-published, n.p., 1922), pp. 350-351, she reprinted the incident in its entirety.

¹²Owens-Adair, Life, p. 85.

¹³See Gaston, Centennial History, p. 594.

¹⁴Larsell, Doctor in Oregon, p. 207.

¹⁵See the Portland Daily Oregonian, 3 November 1875, p. 3.

¹⁶Larsell, Doctor in Oregon, p. 301.

¹⁷Owens-Adair, Life, p. 86.

¹⁸See the New Northwest, 28 December 1877, "Home News."

¹⁹The New Northwest, 31 August 1877.

²⁰Owens-Adair, Life, p. 100.

²¹Ibid., p. 86, p. 323.

²²The Eclectic Medical College of Philadelphia had been a bona fide medical school in its early years but had degenerated into a diploma mill by the late 1870s according to Abrahams, Extinct Medical Schools, pp. 256-268. Abrahams concludes that although the college was suspect, a number of its graduates did receive authentic degrees. Bethenia Owens was among those awarded an authentic degree with the class of 1874, as was Dr. W. L. Adams. The college closed in 1880 with the arrest of its president Dr. John Buchanan for fraud.

²³Owens-Adair, Life, p. 88.

²⁴Letter from Jesse Applegate, 23 June 1878, in Owens-Adair, Life, p. 291.

²⁵This claim is difficult to substantiate because Bethenia did not specifically name the individuals. However, she was personally acquainted with fifteen governors of Oregon; eight she considered her "warm personal friends." They were Governors Gaines, Lane, Grover, Woods, Gibbs, Moody, Chadwick and Thayer. Her political work involved her with numerous individuals in this field, and of course, her standing as a physician would have gained her supporters in that profession willing to vouch for her. Ibid., p. 353.

²⁶Ibid., p. 90.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 89-90.

²⁸Ibid., p. 92.

²⁹Letter to Jesse Applegate, 25 April 1879, in Owens-Adair, Life, p. 293.

³⁰It appears that Asher Marks was Betheria's most constant and faithful suitor. He was a lifelong bachelor. He died at age 65 in Portland, Oregon, at the home of a nephew according to the Roseburg Plaindealer, 4 September 1899.

³¹Letter to Applegate, 25 April 1879, in Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 293-94.

³²Letter to Applegate, 16 June 1879, in Owens-Adair, Life, p. 294.

³³Letter from Applegate, 26 June 1879, in Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 194-96.

³⁴A letter to me from the Dean's Office, University of Michigan Medical School at Ann Arbor, 16 March 1982, states that Betheria Angelina Owens attended that institution from 1878 to 1880 and was awarded the Doctor of Medicine degree in September 1880. The School was unable to forward an academic transcript for that period.

³⁵Asher Marks letter to Betheria Owens, 12 July 1880, was found in Journal 4. The letter's affectionate tone implies a long-standing relationship and coincides with the frequent allusions to "A" and "A.M." which Applegate makes in his letters. Apparently Betheria sent a swatch of her graduation dress to Marks who responded with the hope that in the future he would provide her with much richer gowns.

³⁶Dr. Owens-Adair described the humiliation of being assaulted with rotten eggs when she and other female medical students attended clinics in a lecture on "The Advancement of Women" in Owens-Adair, Life, p. 411, and spoke of her determination to continue to fight those attitudes on p. 373.

³⁷George Hill and Anna Williamson were married in 1881 according to a register of physicians supplied to me by the Yakima Historical Museum.

³⁸Medical frauds and humbugs were the subject of much debate in the 1870s and 1880s due to the absence of state regulation, according to Larsell, Doctor in Oregon, pp. 432-33. He also notes the popularity of eclectic and homeopathic treatments during the period. Apparently sufferers from chronic pain such as rheumatism received relief from such treatments, thus the initial popularity of the so-called "bath doctors." See also, Owens-Adair, Life, p. 97.

³⁹Ehrenreich and English, Witches, Midwives, and Nurses, p. 31.

⁴⁰These statistics are derived from charts found in Walsh, "Doctors Wanted", pp. 185-86. It is also interesting to note that when Betheria sought her first medical degree in 1874 there were only 544 female physicians out of 64,414 in the United States.

⁴¹Owens-Adair, Life, p. 527.

⁴²This gynecological procedure was explained to me by Ardene Wear, R.N., in an interview at the Student Health Center, University of Oregon, 27 July 1983.

⁴³Inez Parker, William Lysander Adams' eldest daughter and Betheria's best friend, said that Betheria did much good work toward assisting women in circumstances similar to the one described. See Owens-Adair, Life, p. 378.

⁴⁴These recommendations are in the form of a letter to the editor, presumably to the Oregonian, 10 January 1882, and found in Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 375-76.

⁴⁵See Oregon State Medical Society, Transactions, 1880-1883, p. 8. At its 14 June 1882 meeting the society voted favorably on Dr. Owens' application for membership.

⁴⁶Descriptions of Mattie are found on pp. 135-38 in Owens-Adair, Life. I obtained a picture of Mattie (see Figure 2) and discussed her with Barbara and John Adair of Corvallis.

⁴⁷Owens-Adair, Life, p. 100.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 100.

⁴⁹General John Adair (1808-1888) was first Collector of Customs for Oregon Territory, appointed by President Polk in 1849. He was the son of a Governor of Kentucky, John Adair. Raised on a plantation, he received tutoring in the classics and studied law at Harvard. He married Mary Ann Dickenson, 2 January 1834. He retired as Customs Collector in 1860 with a change in administration and was followed by William L. Adams. Refer to Corning, Dictionary of Oregon History, p. 2.

⁵⁰A detailed account of the arrival of the Adair family in Astoria was written by Betheria Owens-Adair for her series "The Pioneer Women of Oregon" in the Astoria Daily Astorian, 25 April 1897, p. 6.

⁵¹See Mary Ann Dickenson Adair's diary in the Adair Family Papers, Special Collections, University of Oregon Library.

⁵²Owens-Adair, Life, p. 100.

⁵³See the Salem, Oregon Statesman, 25 August 1862, p. 1.

⁵⁴John Adair's history is the subject of a chapter in Fred Lockley, History of the Columbia (Portland: S. J. Clarke, Publishers, 1928), pp. 239-42, hereafter cited as Lockley, History.

⁵⁵Refer to the Register of Graduates, United States Military Academy, 1802-1953 (New York: The West Point Alumni Foundation, 1953), p. 189, hereafter cited as Register of Graduates.

⁵⁶John Adair's grandfather was the eighth governor of Kentucky. He distinguished himself in the Battle of New Orleans, served Kentucky as governor 1820-1824, as U.S. Senator in 1825, and a Congressman in 1831. For more detail see the Biographical Director of Governors, Vol. II, pp. 512-13, and the National Cyclopedias of American Biography, pp. 3-4.

⁵⁷Register of Graduates, p. 189.

⁵⁸Bancroft, History of Oregon, p. 456.

⁵⁹Charles H. Carey, A General History of Oregon Prior to 1861 (Portland: Metropolitan Press, 1935), p. 456.

⁶⁰The article also reports that the son of Joe Lane was in the rebel army "if dissipation has not killed him." See the Salem, Oregon Statesman, 25 August 1862, p. 1.

⁶¹Astoria, Oregon Weekly Astorian, 13 August 1874, p. 3.

⁶²It has become family custom to refer to John Adair as Colonel, and the author will continue to do so. In her writings and letters Betheria referred to him as Colonel or Col. as did Mattie. His grandson, John Adair, has suggested to me that this name might have been used to distinguish him from his father whose rank was general.

⁶³Miller, Clatsop County, p. 237.

⁶⁴Colonel Adair explains his interest in the reclamation project in The Daily Morning Astorian, 9 December 1899, p. 1.

⁶⁵Owens-Adair, Life, p. 103.

⁶⁶See William B. Adair's letter to Colonel, 22 June 1884, in Journal 3.

⁶⁷New Northwest, 3 July 1884, p. 5.

⁶⁸I discovered the wedding invitation among the Matthews Memorabilia at the Douglas County Museum in Roseburg.

⁶⁹Tom Owens died in Piety Hill, California, 23 January 1873, according to Bancroft, History of Oregon, p. 421.

⁷⁰The Owens-Adair wedding was described in detail in the New Northwest, 31 July 1884, p. 5, the Portland Oregonian, 25 July 1884, p. 5, and the Daily Astorian, 26 July 1884.

⁷¹Betheria and John Adair lived at 241 First Street according to R.L. Polk's Portland City Directory, 1885, p. 102 and p. 319. His business address is also noted. Colonel also maintained a home in Astoria where he traveled frequently to look after his business interests.

⁷²Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 102-3.

⁷³Letter to Mrs. W. W. (Inez Adams) Parker, 15 April 1885, in Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 419-20.

⁷⁴Owens-Adair, Life, p. 102.

⁷⁵Letter from Jesse Applegate, 16 September 1887, in Owens-Adair, Life, p. 299.

⁷⁶See Orpha Collins' unpublished manuscript "Foremost Citizens," p. 10, at the Douglas County Historical Society in Roseburg.

⁷⁷Report of the coroner's inquest, 25 September 1886, found in Journal 4, and funeral notice.

⁷⁸The Tri-Weekly Astorian, 30 October 1886, p. 5.

⁷⁹Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 466-67.

⁸⁰Announcement of the child's death occurred in the same issue as the child's birth in the Tri-Weekly Astorian, 5 February 1887, p. 5. It read that the "infant daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Adair died on the 31st ult. of pneumonia in Portland."

⁸¹Owens-Adair, Life, p. 104.

⁸²Several descriptions of the hardships of country practice are depicted in Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 105-8.

⁸³A biographical sketch provided by the Yakima Historical Museum states that George J. Hill married Anna Williamson in 1881. She died in 1888 leaving one child, Victor, born in 1886. George married Harriet Roberer in 1890.

⁸⁴For a picture of life at Sunnymead farm, including these quotations, see Mattie's diary for January 1 through 18, 1890 in Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 129-133.

⁸⁵Owens-Adair, Life, p. 114.

⁸⁶Colonel Adair entered his son's birth in the Adair Family Bible as October 7, 1891, at Sunnymead Farm. See Figure 3.

⁸⁷John Adair, of Corvallis, the son of John Adair, Jr., told me that the family always accepted Mattie and Colonel as his father's natural parents. Interview 11 July 1983.

⁸⁸This conjecture is my own opinion based on the facts available and family consensus.

⁸⁹George Hill married Hattie Roberer of Illinois in 1890 according to information I obtained from the Yakima Historical Museum.

⁹⁰See Mattie's last letter to her mother written 10 October 1893, in Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 133-34.

⁹¹Owens-Adair, Life, p. 104.

⁹²See "In Memoriam" in Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 135-36.

⁹³The adoption of John Adair, Jr., is found in Clatsop County Probate Journal, pp. 393-34. Judge Thomas E. Edison gave me permission to review the sealed adoption documents in correspondence dated 8 March 1983, but a thorough search by Judge Edison, the county clerk, and myself failed to locate the envelope containing the original sealed document.

⁹⁴See letter from Seymour Condon, 13 February 1889, referring to the bill HB 57 in Journal 4. Betheria believed that young women needed protection against what she termed the "wholesale debauchery" of men, and Condon's bill would raise the age from fourteen to sixteen.

⁹⁵See Marion Harrington, "The Populist Movement in Oregon" (M.A. thesis, University of Oregon, 1935), p. 19, hereafter cited as Harrington, "Populist Movement."

⁹⁶Letter from Stephen F. Chadwick, 24 April 1890, in Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 280-81.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Letter from Mrs. Duniway, 10 May 1896, in Journal 4.

⁹⁹See "Address to Womans Congress," June 18, 1896, in Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 471-78.

¹⁰⁰Ruth B. Moynihan had suggested in "Abigail Scott Duniway," p. 509, that Dr. Mary Thompson and Betheria Owens-Adair had both been vying for Mrs. Duniway's leading position among suffragists. In correspondence 5 August 1982, Dr. Moynihan wrote me that she may have "wrongfully implied" that Dr. Owens-Adair was envious of Mrs. Duniway's position. It seems apparent to me that Betheria remained faithful in her admiration of Mrs. Duniway even though they probably disagreed on the prohibition amendment which Betheria favored and Mrs. Duniway strongly opposed.

¹⁰¹Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 108-9.

¹⁰²The report of the accidental swallowing of sulfuric acid is in the Astoria Daily Budget, 5 April 1899, p. 4. Betheria apparently dismissed the event and wrote later that they arrived in North Yakima, April 6, in Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 109-10.

¹⁰³Owens-Adair, Life, p. 110.

CHAPTER VII

THE LEGACY OF ADVERSITY: 1900-1926

Relocating her practice in North Yakima was a beneficial change for Betherenia. The isolation of the Sunnymead farm, the strenuous nature of her rural practice, the onset of rheumatism, and, of course, the painful events of the past eleven years had taken their toll on both body and spirit. Those years marked the passing of many of her most faithful supporters--Flem in 1886; both Jesse Applegate and her father-in-law, General Adair, in 1888; Mattie in 1893; John Hobson in 1896; and--still a friend--Asher Marks in 1899. Though only in her early sixties Betherenia worked with the vigor of a woman twenty years her junior and prided herself on her young appearance; but she was increasingly preoccupied with longevity. She wrote her friend Dr. Mattie Hughes, a classmate from the Ann Arbor days, that she was not yet very gray and though sixty-four years of age was "seldom taken to be more than 45 or 50."¹ She thought this could be explained in the fact that she had not been brought up in what she termed "the lap of luxury." She also seemed to think that adversity was what gave life zest and increased one's lifespan.²

In the summer of 1900 Betherenia returned to Chicago Clinical School for post-graduate studies. She felt that her isolated rural practice and limited access to the current medical technology warranted a refresher course. In the succeeding summers she retreated from the dry

heat of central Washington to an ocean retreat at Seaside, Oregon, where she offered her services to vacationers at the popular coastal resort.

Bethenia adjusted well to her new habitat, because she could immerse herself, as usual, in her practice and the political causes which needed her attention. It was not so easy for Colonel and John, Jr. Colonel had tried unsuccessfully to occupy himself in business, but his major interests and properties remained centered in the Astoria area. Thus in 1902 Colonel returned to the Sunnymead farm with his son. Bethenia promised that when their properties became self-supporting she would retire and rejoin them at Sunnymead.³

Only vestiges of the prejudice that had barred women from practicing medicine on an equal footing with their male colleagues remained. The moribund Yakima Medical Association, perhaps hoping that a woman would enliven the group, elected Bethenia their president. Bethenia found the organization in appalling disarray with the national organization threatening to drop the Yakima Chapter because of its internal dissension and lapsed dues. Bethenia found this behavior by her fellow physicians inexcusable, and she quickly "took the dilemma by the horns." Although it was rumored that some of the members still held their old prejudices about a female physician, they treated Bethenia with "respectful consideration," assuring her that she was not an "objectionable feature" after all. She managed to keep their respect while performing the unpleasant task of calling personally upon each physician and exacting his unpaid fees. An optimist and a peacemaker, Bethenia advised her colleagues to mend their jealousies, avoid "petty notoriety" and professional squabbling, and "come together on a broader and more

humane footing." She reminded them of the old adage that in "union there is strength," and no doubt, at least during her tenure, the organization was infused with some of her own vigor and commitment.⁴

Bethenia's professional interests in North Yakima did not prevent her from being greatly interested in the political events occurring in her home state. Her journals abound with letters from prominent Oregonians whom she continuously queried about her specially favored causes. She was particularly fond of her Fulton relatives (by marriage) and followed their careers with interest. On January 24, 1903, she wrote to her niece Ada's husband, Charles W. Fulton, a few words of encouragement regarding his hoped-for appointment to the U.S. Senate which was under consideration in the Oregon state legislature. "Hold fast and never give up," she wrote. "Now you have the inside track; stick close to the fence, and you will get there."⁵ That spring she told Binger Hermann she wished they were not so far apart for she wished to shake his hand and congratulate him on his recent election to the U.S. House of Representatives. She said that "Oregon is sure to forge ahead" with Hermann, Fulton (whom she referred to as "our Charley"), and that "Old war-house, Mitchell" now elected to Congress. Four days later Hermann replied from Roseburg that he was pleased that his "much valued...old and loyal friend" was among the ranks of his supporters.⁶

By 1905 the country was in a state of "feverish excitement" over the revelation that some of their Congressmen were involved in the misapplication of federal land laws. Bethenia told Clyde Fulton that "the mere contact with persons associated with fraud becomes contamination," and she was quite relieved that C. W. was not involved in the

scandal. As for John Hipple Mitchell, she felt that he was "in his dotage" and should have taken his own advice to "burn this letter." She had never really liked Mitchell, because she "never could forgive a man for falling in love with his wife's sister," thus alluding to one of the early scandals which characterized the controversial politician but never seemed to hinder his progress in Oregon's Gilded Age political era. Betherenia felt more kindly toward her old friend Hermann, also implicated in the fraud but eventually cleared, for he had "always been my friend and the friend of our family."⁷

She summarized her opinion on the Oregon land frauds by saying that "this upheaval will serve a good purpose in that it will educate the people to respect and obey the laws of their country and that honesty is better than 'sharp practice.'"⁸ Her view seems to illustrate the polarity between the reform ethics of the progressives and the old guard which accepted corruption and graft if it served their own interests.

The following summer Betherenia traveled to Portland where she and other women physicians were paid a special tribute by the American Medical Association in recognition of their accomplishments in the field of medicine. This banquet was an especially joyous occasion for Betherenia, because it was the first time that women had been "acknowledged before the world as the equal of men in medicine and surgery." For Betherenia this meeting celebrated the culmination of a lifetime devoted to the study and practice of medicine, and although it was not Betherenia's habit to look back there was one area she regretted not specializing in--surgery. Although a large portion of her practice was in surgery, she had always believed that to be an exceptional surgeon

she would have needed much more specialized training, and here she chose to put marriage and motherhood before her beloved profession.⁹

On October 10, 1905, at age sixty-five, Bethenia closed her office in North Yakima and retired from medicine. During her five years in that community she had made many friends, treated scores of its citizens, presided over the Yakima County Medical Association, and earned approximately \$25,000 for her services. Alone, she drove her carriage overland to The Dalles, visiting friends along the way, and then boarded a steamer for Portland retracing the route which her family had traveled by canoe more than sixty years before. She had dinner with her sisters and nieces in Portland and boarded another steamer for an overnight voyage to Astoria and home.⁹

After a month's visit with Colonel and the children Bethenia traveled on the Roanoke to San Diego, California, where she began writing her autobiography at the home of her friend, Inez Adams Parker. She dedicated the autobiography to her mother, calling it "the first child of my brain." It was a collection of historical sketches she had published under the title "Pioneer Women of Oregon" for the Astoria press, and a potpourri of letters, recollections, speeches, and miscellaneous writings. She was motivated to write the book, entitled Dr. Owens-Adair, Some of Her Life Experiences (Portland: Mann & Beach, Printers, 1906) by a desire to preserve the early history of Oregon. She said that she wanted to show how pioneer women had "labored and struggled to gain an entrance into the various avenues of industry, and to make it respectable to earn her honest bread by the side of her brother, man."¹⁰ She was extremely proud of the 537-page volume, and it

was well received by reviewers from a variety of Oregon and Washington publications including the Portland Oregon Journal, the Portland Oregonian, the Astoria Morning Astorian, the Astoria Daily Budget, the Yakima, Washington Herald, and the Portland Woman's Tribune. The book was acclaimed as a "sterling representative of one of the great pioneer families of Oregon" and an accurate assessment of the life and times of its subject. One reviewer wrote that as one reads, one can hear "this good woman talking...there is the same wholesome, straight-forward, convincing intelligence" that lends realism to any good story. Another said that he found the book interesting in "style and diction," the "facts being given without any view to self-praise or egotism."¹¹ Eva Emery Dye, the historical novelist, remarked that Betherenia's story was "worth all the fiction ever written." Mrs. Dye thought that Betherenia had influenced not only her immediate surroundings but far beyond. She said "Oregon is indebted to you not alone for your efforts for yourself and all womankind, but also for this plain and lucid narrative of it all."¹²

The excitement of having her book so well received was insufficient to ward off the shocking experience she received when she arrived home from California. It appeared that Colonel had totally failed in his promise to see that the farmlands surrounding Sunnymead would be well taken care of in Betherenia's absence. Betherenia found neglect and destruction everywhere in the rundown buildings and overgrown orchards and gardens at Sunnymead Farm. To her dismay, she discovered that the house was "unfit for occupation." Colonel probably had moved to town during Betherenia's absence to be closer to the center of business and

society. Betheria summarized the next six years vaguely: "Suffice it to say that I have lived through it all and still have my health."¹³ Within the year the couple apparently decided to divide their properties and to live apart. On September 30, 1907, they signed a partition deed which separated their holdings into two sections. Colonel retained the lands nearest the community of Warrenton, the lands he had reclaimed and the various subdivisions known as Sunnymead Addition, and Betheria retained the land further south, the site of Sunnymead Farm and another homesite she called Grandview.¹⁴ On the day that they drew up the deed, Betheria deposited \$7,350 in gold and silver coin in the Astoria Savings Bank.¹⁵ It appears that Colonel paid Betheria for the property in cash; a large sum which he may have acquired by selling off some of his own real estate. One might speculate that Colonel had so mismanaged the couple's joint property that Betheria felt it necessary to separate her home and farm from Colonel's speculative venture for fear that she would lose all of her hard-earned investments if his business failed completely.¹⁶

Although the restoration of her properties was expensive, Betheria retained sufficient funds to put the farm in order and pursue, at her own expense, the causes which were to engage her interest for the next nineteen years. It was her belief that the two great enemies of women (and their children) were liquor and lust. She pursued both for more than thirty years in her writing and lectures as the WCTU's state superintendent of hygiene and heredity. Now she focused on a solution which she believed would eliminate the danger of criminals and the insane from further endangering humanity--humane sterilization. She had decided

early in her work in hospitals and asylums that it was "women who are the sufferers." She felt that by amending the laws so that criminals could no longer reproduce their kind that women no longer be the victims of physical abuse, rape, and murder.¹⁷

The ideas which Bethenia and other nineteenth-century advocates of the eugenics movement came to accept had emerged from currents of thought developed after Charles Darwin published The Origin of the Species in 1859. The biological progress of humanity, the Darwinists claimed, resulted from the selection of the fittest members of the species and the elimination of the unfit. Darwin himself pointed out that "civilized men" had done their utmost to "check the process of elimination" by building institutions and creating laws which served to protect the unfit. Thus some believed that by permitting the survival and propagation of "social failures" humanity might be barring progress, and increasing the ills which it sought to cure. Eugenists saw a simple solution to this dilemma. Believing that each human's physique, intellect, and character were rooted chiefly in heredity, it would be in the best interests of the continued evolution of humanity to prevent the unfit from propagating and encourage the fit to propagate early and often.¹⁸ These were the ideas which Bethenia and other eugenists hoped would build a better civilization.

Bethenia accepted these ideas in the spirit of scientific reform, lecturing that heredity is a "law of nature" and that bad as well as good is transmitted from parent to offspring in both physical and mental faculties. She believed that by understanding the laws of heredity "we can protect our nation from insanity, epilepsy, and the varied train of

abnormalities that follow in their wake." She had hopes that by preventing criminals and the insane from reproducing their kind that "the doors of our penitentiaries, institutions, under whose burdens we are now groaning, mentally, physically, and financially, would forever be closed."¹⁹ She appealed to the Multnomah Medical Association to consider sterilization as a means to "protect your innocent children and your children's children."²⁰ Finally, she went to the halls of the Oregon legislature to advance the bills which provided for compulsory sterilization of certain classes of criminals and insane individuals. A bill was introduced in the legislature of 1907, but defeated in the house of representatives as "a little to advanced for today." In 1909 it passed the legislature but was vetoed by Governor George Chamberlain. Four years later the bill was again defeated. In 1917 the bill was signed by Governor James Withycombe. In 1919 another bill was passed, and the 1920 certification of the laws of the state contained both statutes. However, the Circuit Court of Marion County in 1921 declared both laws unconstitutional and the decision was not appealed.²¹

Although her efforts in behalf of humane sterilization of the unfit went down to defeat, the other cause which Bethenia had worked on for so long--woman suffrage--did gain victory in November 1912 with the signing of the equal suffrage amendment for women.

It is possible that involvement in these political causes and her other social commitments occupied Bethenia in a degree sufficient to fill some of the loss she must have suffered during her separation from Colonel. His health gradually declined during 1914, and he died at St. Mary's Hospital in Astoria November 20, 1915, following a period of

"lingering illness due to general debility."²² Years of ill health and financial mismanagement combined to completely dissipate any fortune he might have accumulated, for he "died destitute" according to E. E. Gray a guardian appointed by the court in June 1915. The guardianship was instituted at the request of his brother Samuel D. Adair, and was awarded to Colonel's son, John Adair, Jr. At the time the document was drawn up, August 28, 1915, Colonel's attorneys stipulated that he was "unmarried, had no home, and no one to provide comfort and care." Further, the document stated that Colonel's indebtedness required the services of a guardian to determine the value of the estate.²³ Colonel Adair's will, drawn up in February 1913, had bequeathed his various properties to his sisters, brothers, and son. Gray, the guardian, conducted an extensive investigation in Oregon, Washington, and Canada to determine the extent of Colonel's holdings and declared that there was no personal property remaining save fourteen dollars in a checking account at the Astoria Savings Bank and \$197 in a checking account at the First National Bank of Portland. Gray was unable to locate the "large and valuable" tracts of realty which Colonel was said to own in Oregon and Canada. On April 21, 1913, Colonel had evaluated his net worth as \$156,260 consisting mostly of cattle and lands but Gray after "painstaking efforts" to ascertain the status of the properties and money, had drawn a blank.

It appears that Colonel had been obliged to sign over the bulk of his land in the Warrenton division to his attorneys in order to absolve tax liens against the property, according to a summons served by the district attorney's office, June 17, 1915.²⁴ A document, Exhibit A, represents a conveyance whereby all lands which Colonel owned had been

signed over to George Warren, an Astoria banker and merchant, "to clean up indebtedness against the property." This included all of the land on the west side of Young's Bay belonging to Colonel except a twenty-acre parcel which he deeded to his son.

Colonel Adair was eulogized as a man of kindly disposition who had engaged principally in agriculture, dairying, and real estate.²⁵ Early in their marriage Betheria had described him as a man with a sunny, optimistic nature, who attended casually to matters of business. Perhaps it was this imprecision in financial matters which led to his diminished fortune.

Comfortably settled into retirement, Betheria managed the Sunnymead properties by leasing the land and facilities to dairy farmers. At some point following her separation from Colonel, probably in 1907, she had moved from the residence they had occupied into a newer home a few hundred feet down the road which she called Grandview.²⁶ This home had a commanding view of Young's Bay and the Columbia River which Betheria could see from her glassed-in front porch.²⁷ True to her promise that "the latch string is always out" she delighted in the planning of various entertainments for her numerous friends. Luncheons, picnics, basket dinners, and barn dances replete with full orchestra gave an atmosphere of gaiety to Grandview. On July 15, 1909, more than five hundred people converged there for a picnic and barn dance.²⁸ Many arrived by train at the Sunnymead station where they were met by Betheria's carriages and transported up to the festivities a mile or so away.²⁹

In addition to her frequent traveling to Portland and Salem in the interests of the eugenics measures and WCTU and suffrage matters through the early 1900s, Betheria took a three-month tour of Europe in 1911 with her granddaughter Vera Hill (daughter of George and Hattie).³⁰

Disappointment over the unconstitutionality of the humane sterilization law in 1921 did not deter Betheria from continuing to work for that cause. In February 1922 she was in Paso Robles, California, lecturing on temperance and eugenics. A banquet celebrating her eighty-second birthday was announced in the Paso Robles newspapers, and letters and telegrams poured in from old friends and admirers with whom she had worked--politicians, physicians, WCTU and Red Cross stalwarts, and a number of professional and social acquaintances.³¹ It appeared that Betheria--well into her eighties--was virtually indestructible as she traveled between Oregon and California visiting and pursuing her political interests. At home in Oregon she complained about the effects of the damp climate on her rheumatism--she now used a crutch to compensate for slight lameness--but she never seriously considered leaving her beloved Sunnymead home with its lovely gardens and orchards and superb vistas. In 1924 she told Fred Lockley that she could still mount her horse from the ground and lift herself into the saddle. She scoffed at the physical decline of old age and remarked tartly that "most people rust out" from inactivity. "I know my mind is clear and I know that I can see as far into a hole as I ever did," she told him, indicating that her powers of observation were as acute as ever.³²

In spite of her determined efforts to resist old age Betheria finally had to admit that she needed help in managing Sunnymead. In

January 1925 she arranged for Frank Patton, President of the Astoria Bank, to be appointed guardian of her property. The petition filed in Clatsop County Circuit Court noted that "age and physical infirmity have made it hard for her to take care of her business affairs." Patton, whom she described as an "intimate acquaintance," and attorney Edwin C. Judd assumed the care of the estate which they found in a "dilapidated, run-down condition." The farm consisted of about four hundred acres and for a period of time had not provided any income for Betherenia. Patton financed the estate and with her permission borrowed from the Astoria Savings Bank to put the grounds into shape. He paid for the services of housekeepers, grocery and hardware bills, and other miscellaneous expenses. He also arranged for repairs on the barn and outbuildings so that the pastures could be harvested and hay stored.³³

When Patton assumed care of the estate, an inventory was taken of the house and grounds. Betherenia's home was richly appointed with fine wood and upholstered furnishings, oriental carpets, clocks and brass curios, expensive china and silverplate, and sundry other items customarily found in well-to-do homes. Also, there was a collection of more than 250 books in her private library. Relatives later said that most of these were given by Betherenia to the housekeepers and caretakers who lived on the farm, probably in payment for services in lieu of cash.³⁴

Betherenia's last appearance in public was for the dedication of the Astoria Column, a one hundred and twenty-five foot landmark commemorating major events in Pacific Northwest history, situated on Coxcomb Hill overlooking the Columbia River and the city of Astoria below. Shortly afterwards, she became ill and on September 11, 1926, at the age of



Figure 4. Dr. Owens-Adair (ca. 1924).

eighty-six, she died of a heart ailment at home, one of the most celebrated and honored women pioneers in Oregon history.³⁵

In life Bethenia had been a sharply intelligent, resilient spirit who never accepted setbacks without turning them into personal achievement. Thus it was only after her death that her final request--a situation over which she had no control--went down to defeat. In her will she had stipulated that the bulk of her estate was to be used to found a eugenics institute to be "used for the benefit of humanity along the line on which I have been working for so many years," and that a public park--Owens Park--be created at Warrenton. These bequests were never to be realized. When Frank Patton and Edwin Judd gave a final accounting of Bethenia's estate it was found deficient almost two thousand dollars, the majority of it having been sold to absolve mortgages, notes, court costs, administrative fees and funeral charges, and tax liens. Her children, George Hill and John Adair, Jr., received modest bequests as did her grandchildren, for it was her contention that "gifts of money as a rule do not bring happiness and profit" to those who receive them, and she felt she had provided generously for them all while she was alive.³⁶

A former Astorian has raised the possibility that Bethenia was "bilked" out of her estate by unscrupulous administrators.³⁷ Neither George J. Hill, nor John Adair, Jr., made exception to the court's final judgment which accepted the report of bank president Patton and attorney Judd. Given the dynamics of small-town life, it was highly unlikely that men of unimpeachable reputation like Patton or Judd (by then a judge) would risk their position in business and society to take advantage of a personal friend.³⁸ Edwin Judd was characterized as having a

"deep respect" for his client, and in her final years had taken a personal interest in Betherenia's welfare above and beyond the call of professional duty. Often on weekends, Judd drove out to Sunnymead with his daughters, Carol and Elizabeth, to see if Betherenia needed anything to make her comfortable. Apparently he had found her somewhat "needy and lonely" and had made an effort to visit her.³⁹

Betherenia's funeral was held at Ocean View Cemetery in Warrenton, a few miles south of Astoria. Her burial site was unmarked until 1975 when the Clatsop County Historical Society, under the direction of Bruce Berney, director of the Astoria Public Library, acquired the funds to erect a head stone at her gravesite. The Betherenia Owens-Adair monument was dedicated July 19, 1975, with a host of Oregon public officials, scholars, and historians paying tribute, finally, to one of its most illustrious female citizens. The ceremonies celebrated her achievements as a feminist, teacher, physician, and reformer.⁴⁰ Her newly engraved epitaph--placed alongside the caduceus, the physician's symbolic staff--bore the following legend: "Only the enterprising and the brave are actuated to become pioneers."

Six years later in the summer of 1981, the Clatsop County Housing Authority remodeled the old St. Mary's Hospital in Astoria, converting it into "The Owens-Adair"--forty-six specially designed apartments for Clatsop County's elderly citizens--a final and lasting tribute to its pioneer physician.⁴¹

* * * *

Betherenia Owens-Adair's character was marked with an extraordinary resilience--an attitude she believed was an hereditary consequence of

her pioneer ancestry---which sustained her in the conflicts she confronted in her roles as physician, wife, and mother. Frontier custom and parental encouragement taught her to be independent and decisive at an early age; however, these traits served her with dubious success in a society which valued conformity and deference in the female sex. Her efforts to educate herself, make herself financially self-sufficient, and to regain her place in society politicized her so that she took up the cause of equal rights for women. She campaigned tirelessly against the ideology, ingrained social habits, and institutions which prevented women from exercising the full rights of citizenship and which denied them access to education, and financial and personal fulfillment in careers of their choice.

For many years she subsumed her feminine nature into her career as a physician seeing the two as mutually complementary, and decided that she could be of more value to humanity as a healer. However, in middle-age, her love for a quixotic, charismatic husband, drew her away from her professional success as a city physician to a rural practice, where domestic tragedy, depression and ill health threatened to conquer her tenacious ability to survive. But survive she did--by redirecting her considerable courage and energy toward goals which she believed would benefit humanity.

In goals of the spirit--the ideals which she sought--Dr. Owens-Adair's life was a success. She spoke out early against ignorance, disease, and inequality and lived far enough into the twentieth century to see these ideals come to fruition. Her personal life was a panoply of disappointment, disillusionment, and poignant betrayal; and yet she

focused none of her emotion on recrimination or bitterness. Instead she managed her personal life with an equanimity and dignity which brought her personal fulfillment.

Dr. Owens-Adair's achievement as an historical figure was the legacy of the pioneer: her imagination was sparked by challenge in a field which excluded women, she accepted the role of trail blazer, and she survived to become a resounding professional success. The price she paid was a life of adversity; the reward she reaped was the knowledge that she was triumphantly equal to the fight.

Notes

¹Letter to Dr. Mattie Hughes on April 24, 1905 is found in Owens-Adair, Life, p. 497.

²The comments on longevity are found in a letter to Susan B. Anthony written March 28, 1905, and found in Owens-Adair, Life, p. 520.

³Ibid., p. 111.

⁴The foregoing was extracted from a handwritten text which Betheria titled "Address of Dr. Adair to the Yakima County Medical Association." News clippings on adjacent pages in Journal 3 announce her election to the presidency of the organization. Unfortunately none of this material is dated but one may safely conclude that these events occurred between 1900 and 1905.

⁵Letter to C. W. Fulton, 24 January 1903, discovered in Journal 3. Fulton (1853-1918) was elected to the U. S. Senate in 1903 by a legislative appointment and served six years. Previously he was in the Oregon state senate 1878 through 1901. He married Ada Hobson, John and Diana Hobson's daughter in 1886. See Corning, Dictionary of Oregon History, p. 94.

⁶Letter from Betheria to Binger Hermann, 11 April 1903, in Journal 3. Hermann (1843-1926) served in Congress from 1903-1907. He had been U.S. Land Commissioner, 1897-1903, and in 1902 had been tried (and acquitted) for alleged misdeeds as Commissioner of the Public Lands. See Corning, Dictionary of Oregon History, p. 112.

⁷Betheria's letter to Clyde Fulton, 19 February 1905, is found in Journal 3. John Hipple Mitchell (1835-1905) in spite of unsavory allegations had a loyal following in Oregon. He died in 1905 while appealing a conviction for bribery according to Corning, Dictionary of Oregon History, p. 168.

⁸Ibid.

⁹The Portland Medical Club sponsored the AMA banquet in 1905 honoring the region's women physicians as depicted in Owens-Adair, Life, pp. 531-33. Betheria's conflict between a desire to specialize in surgery and the responsibilities of marriage and motherhood are found on p. 528.

¹⁰Refer to the "Salutary" (no page number) at the beginning of Owens-Adair, Life.

¹¹Refer to reviews, all in December 1906, on pp. 9-20 in Betheria Owens-Adair, Souvenir (Salem: Statesman Publishing Company, 1922), hereafter cited as Owens-Adair, Souvenir.

¹²See letter from Eva Emery Dye, 4 December 1906, in Owens-Adair, Souvenir, p. 20.

¹³Refer to an autobiographical sketch in Gaston, Centennial History, p. 596, probably written around 1911 by Bethenia.

¹⁴The partition deed was among the papers held by John Adair of Corvallis.

¹⁵A deposit slip signed by Dr. Owens-Adair and Dave Patton, cashier of the Astoria Savings Bank, 30 September 1907, was found in Journal 4.

¹⁶When I talked to Marjorie Adair Leback, Colonel Adair's granddaughter, she said that it was believed in the family that Colonel, by this time, was drinking heavily and generally mismanaging his personal and business affairs. Interview 11 February 1983.

¹⁷See interview by Fred Lockley in the Portland Oregon Journal, 27 February 1921, which outlines Bethenia's reasons for embracing the idea of sterilization. This clipping was among the Lockley Papers, Special Collections, University of Oregon library.

¹⁸A thorough discussion of the Eugenics Movement is found in Mark H. Haller, Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1963), pp. 4-6.

¹⁹Owens-Adair, Life, p. 388 and p. 414.

²⁰See typewritten draft of speech to the Multnomah Medical Association, 20 January 1909, in Journal 4.

²¹Larsell, Doctor in Oregon, pp. 285-86, and an article on the defeat of the sterilization bill in the Astoria Daily Budget, 8 June 1921, p. 1.

²²See obituary notice in the Astoria Daily Budget, 20 November 1915, p. 6. Notices of his death also were found in Journal 3. Comments in a document entitled Guardianship, Clatsop County Probate Records in Astoria, also detail the nature and extent of Colonel's ill health through 1914.

²³Colonel Adair's grandchildren do not believe he and Bethenia were legally divorced although they and their representatives may have felt that the length of their separation signified they were no longer living in a married state. Documents relating to Colonel Adair's guardianship, will, and properties may be found in the Clatsop County courthouse, Astoria, in the probate records, envelopes 1206 and 1262. Hereafter these records will be cited as probate records.

²⁴Probate records, envelope 1262.

²⁵Obituary, Astoria Daily Budget, 20 November 1915, p. 6.

²⁶Bethenia leased Sunnymead to George Tucker in 1908 according to an article in the Astoria Daily Budget, 3 December 1908, p. 6. A second lease was reported 22 June 1909 in the Astoria Daily Budget. Hugh Battanbee leased 300 acres from her 29 December 1910, and a five year lease on her property was given to Carl Johanson and Albert Hendrickson according to the Astoria Daily Budget, 8 January 1912.

²⁷A description of Bethenia's last home was drawn for me by Richard Engeman, of the Southern Oregon Historical Society at Jacksonville. Mr. Engeman resided in the house in the early 1960s and was kind enough to provide maps, drawings, and descriptions of the area.

²⁸Picnics and various festivities were a regular event at Sunnymead and later at Grandview according to newspaper clippings found in Journals 2, 3, and 4 and stories in the Astoria newspaper. Five hundred people attended the picnic and dance 15 July 1909, p. 5, Astoria Daily Budget.

²⁹The Spokane, Portland and Seattle Railway provided daily service with a stop at the Sunnymead station according to a timetable sent to me by Richard Engeman of the Southern Oregon Historical Society. A public service railway was begun in that area in 1888. A description of the service and connections in the area is found in Miller, Clatsop County, pp. 156-62.

³⁰Newspaper clippings under Vera Hill's byline describing this tour were found in Journal 3.

³¹Among the political allies who sent their respects on Bethenia's eighty-second birthday were Governor Ben Olcott, former Governor Oswald West, State Senator Robert S. Farrell, State Senator W. W. Banks, the president of University of Michigan, and numerous other professional and political friends. See Souvenir, pp. 41-63 for these greetings and the story of the birthday banquet in the 7 February 1922 Paso Robles Press.

³²Letter from Bethenia Owens-Adair to Fred Lockley, 29 December 1924, can be found in the Lockley Papers, Special Collections, University of Oregon Library.

³³Frank Patton seemed to have taken a personal interest in seeing that Sunnymead Farm was well run. See Probate Journal, Clatsop County courthouse, Astoria, for Petition for the Appointment of Guardian which Bethenia initiated on 13 January 1925.

³⁴Marjorie Adair Leback told me that her mother Grace Dawson Adair, wife of John Adair, Jr., noticed the gradual loss of her mother-in-law's effects. Grace Adair believed that the hired help took advantage of Bethenia's generosity and the fact that she had little cash to pay wages. The guardianship documents imply that in at least one case the

judge refused to honor a bill which he felt grossly overcharged for services. For further information consult Probate Records and guardianship.

³⁵Olga Freeman, "Pioneer Women of Oregon," Lane County Historian Vol XI, No. 4 (Winter 1966), p. 69. Obituary notices included those in the Astoria Evening Budget, 13 September 1926, p. 3, and the editorial in the 14 September 1926 issues, p. 3. The photograph, Figure 4, was probably taken around 1924.

³⁶See probate records for document entitled "Report to the State Treasurer" for details of the assets and liabilities of Dr. Owens-Adair's estate and also her will, envelopes 2212 and 2270.

³⁷Janet Stevenson, a former resident of Astoria, advanced the theory that Betheria had been bilked out of her estate by "attorneys and bankers" in a talk given to the Clatsop County Historical Society, 11 April 1973. A tape of the talk is available at the Astoria Public Library.

³⁸Marjorie Halderman told me that her father, Charles Halderman, an attorney and friend of Frank Patton said that there never was a "hint of scandal" regarding the disposition of Betheria's estate. Interview with Miss Halderman 11 February 1983.

³⁹Elizabeth Judd Niekes, Oakland, California, related her memories of Edwin Judd's relationship with Dr. Owens-Adair in several letters we exchanged in January and February 1983. Mrs. Niekes also obtained information from her ninety-one year old mother, a resident of San Mateo, California. Both women recalled that Mr. Judd considered Dr. Owens-Adair an intelligent woman, and a personal friend. In her last years, Mr. Judd found Dr. Owens-Adair "isolated and needy" and arranged for doctors to visit her.

⁴⁰Details on the efforts to raise funds for the monument and a program of the dedication ceremonies can be obtained from Bruce Berney, Astoria Public Library.

⁴¹The Daily Astorian, 12 March 1981.

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